

仮想領域

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001

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KUOCHI KAZUMA

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Prologue - The Day They Returned to Being Siblings

Part 1

"...eh? You are back to being siblings?"

"Didn't I tell you that for a while now?"

A vast grassland was spreading in every direction, likely reaching the ends of the earth.

Wind faintly caressed the grass producing one, two waves of dark green. And standing in the middle of the spreading glittering wave, were two girls.

One of them, was wearing a mysteriously blended kimono. The other one, was wearing something that looked like a white coat.

"U—mm, I knew you have a brother, you've always been bragging about it ever since we first met."

"Yes. He's a brother a little sister like me can be proud of."

The girl with chestnut coloured hair who wore a white coat had a troubled expression. Her hair that was reaching her shoulder blades, swayed lightly in the wind.

The other one, the 『Little Sister』, wore a strange, modified kimono. She had glossy black hair, long enough to cover the entirety of her thin back that was shaped like a piece of art. And above all, there was one more characteristic – she had clear and serene sky-blue eyes like a lapis lazuli.

"Little Sister longed for this day to come. Finally being able to live together with Brother. Can you understand the feelings of a little sister who, for 8 years was, aaa—always waiting for this day? No, Rucchan who is not a little sister, cannot understand it."

"...eh? Is it only Rui-san who thinks what she heard was weird?"

Being unable to meet their precious person——she didn't seem to hear it like that.

Rucchan, Saionji Rui, showed an even more troubled expression.

Looking at her friend's expression, Fuyuki regretted her fierce outburst.

"It's not strange at all, every little drop of Little Sister's blood, every strand of her hair, exists for the sake of her brother. And her brother's everything, from the tips of his toes, to the top of his head, belongs to Little Sister. Isn't that common sense in this world?"

"No, I've never heard of such common sense. Rather, aren't siblings like that scary?"

"How rude. What do you know about little sisters, Rucchan?"

"Certainly, Rui-san isn't a little sister, however, at least she knows it's weird."

Lately——she thought that her best friend really loved her brother.

Ever since she met her, she heard so many stories about her brother, anyone listening to it would notice that.

Indeed, Karasuba Fuyuki is a brocon, and an extreme one too.

The fact that she had a very small body aside, ten out of ten men would find her attractive.

Speaking of which, that girl had no interest in any men other than her brother——

"Just now, I've had a really bad feeling. Did you think of something rude?"

"Ahaha, there's no such thing."

And she was quite sharp.

Fuyuki looked at Rui who broke out in a cold sweat after lying to her. However, her line of sight was drawn lower as she thought——and stopped at the bulging out chest that couldn't compare to her own.

"...it's all right, Little Sister. You know your size is just right for your height."

"Don't scowl like you want to take revenge on your parents when you say that."

Thoughtlessly, Rui got quite scared because she had a well-endowed body.

It could not be helped, because for girls in puberty, the size of their breasts was a symbol of status.

Especially, when comparing her breasts with her friend's who was the same age, Fuyuki's turned out quite pitiful.

"...I'm not envious at all."

"Ahaha..."

The two of them walked through the vast grassland that does not exist in modern Japan. Although, because of that topic, the atmosphere around them might have become a little bit threatening, they were getting along quite well.

"Now, what did we talk about again?"

"About Brother!"

"Ah, that's right. So, what do you mean you're back to being siblings? You're saying it as if you weren't siblings until now."

"Hmm, Rucchan, how much did I tell you about Brother?"

"A lot, and in detail. I imagine him to be an amazing person after hearing Fuyuki's stories."

"And about Little Sister's home?"

"Your parents died 8 years ago and you were picked up by the Karasubas, or something like that."

She was lucky to be taken in by the Karasuba group, which was a leading network company in the world~, is what she thought. Though she didn't know about her daily life because she never met her best friend outside of the ElySION, she was definitely living quite a wealthy life.

"If you know that much, the rest is simple. Brother and Little Sister were taken to separate houses and were forbidden to meet ever since."

"In other words, for whole 8 years?"

For Rui, learning that, was the biggest surprise today.

And this brocon little sister endured such long period of time well~, that's one.

The other was, why does she yearn for him so much even though they haven't met in 8 years~.

Didn't she consider he might have changed at all?

Moreover, it's been 8 years. There's no telling how he grew up.

Considering the little sister's looks, her brother couldn't be ugly, however, there was no way of knowing how his personality was.

When she asked about that——

"I'm not worried at all, in the first place, we've been in touch since last year."

"Umm? Weren't you forbidden from meeting each other?"

"We didn't meet, we spoke face to face through the terminal."

Terminal——an abbreviation for Individual Structure Management Terminal——that allowed interactive face-to-face communication with a far away location using a Hologram, however...

"...The Karasubas overlooked such a simple thing?"

"No way. I'm happy that we met in the cyber world, as expected the monitoring was very strict, I had no choice but to hack Karasuba

headquarters and rewrite the terminal monitoring program. Understanding the program structure, camouflaging anti-monitoring measures, cracking security... and it took me 7 years to skill up."

"No, you're talking about doing something crazy hard as if it was something simple? Can Fuyuki do such a thing?"

The world's biggest networking company, 『Karasuba』, hacking into its headquarters with 7 years worth of hacking experience, a girl at the young age of 15.

Just for the sake of contacting her brother.

"...Oh well, that's fine. It can't be helped, now that it's done. So, why were you forbidden from meeting in the first place? Was the relationship between the households you were taken into that bad?"

"That's one of the reasons, the main reason was to prevent both of us from escaping. Because, Little Sister always said that she wanted to live together with Brother."

"...in other words, they were concerned that you would elope. No matter how you look at it, you're siblings so that's——"

"That's why we had to wait 8 years before we could run away."

"..."

"..."

"Eh? To elope?"

"Yes. Because it's the only way for me to be together with Brother."

Fuyuki said to Rui, causing her to be stunned in amazement. Despite her repeating brother brother brother-brother-brother for years, she didn't think it would go that far.

"That means the property nearby you told me about? Is that——"

"Ah, I didn't tell you yet. I'll be in your care from tomorrow onwards."

"Do you intend on moving away and making a runaway declaration at once?"

"We already have enough money for living expenses, it's a good time as we are about to enter high school. Also, we don't intend to – we already did. Little Sister is currently in a business hotel."

"...You're lucky that Karasuba didn't find you."

Fuyuki was a genius programmer, and a hacker. The Karasuba group won't let her out of their hands because she'll yield profits. They won't let go of her as long as she continues to do so.

"I've stopped Karasuba main server just before, giving myself time to move. And, while I was at it, I made a change in the family register, Little Sister is no longer 『Karasuba Fuyuki』."

"Stopped the main server..."

"Oh, I've also infected it with a virus that will not allow it to recover that easily. Little Sister's special, it will take at least three days to remove it."

"That's a billion... no, the damages might be even worse."

"Little Sister left that house now, I don't know them anymore. In the first place, Karasuba were the ones who pulled Brother and Little Sister apart, I resent them to the bone."

The dark emotions Fuyuki harboured could be seen in her vividly coloured pupils. She actually held techniques good enough to stop a world-renowned cyber company, and the intent to perform such a thing without hesitation. A chill went down Rui's spine.

Trying to shake that thought away, she changed the topic.

"Also, what about your brother? He ran away from home too, right?"

"Yes. Brother is heading to this hotel today, he should have arrived in the city by now——"

She stopped, stood still, and was looking towards the sky.

A distant, crystal clear, and cloudless fantastical sky spread in every direction. It was as if her eyes saw the other world in the distance, the real world.

"I'm in the middle of running away from home."

She muttered.

It was time for Fuyuki's and Rui's encounter in the cyber world to end.

Part 2

A large Japanese-style building in the mountains far from populated areas. Though the mansion was usually silent, inhabited, and wrapped in the darkness of the night. That day, its appearance was different from usual.

Echoing and cutting through the darkness were sounds of gunfire and metal crossing each other.

"Pursue him, don't let him escape in the name of Renjou!"

"Yes!!"

Men belonging to the military, instructed by their leader, on orders from their commander were chasing after a single boy that was running away.

He had black hair that was suitably trimmed. The good looking boy had a fearless expression. Aware that pursuers were approaching from behind, he ran through the long corridor.

Even as he ran as fast as the wind, his sky-blue eyes reflected light like a lapis lazuli stone.

"Geez, how disciplined. Unless I do something I'll be caught!!"

After he muttered these words a projectile was shot from behind. The number of pursuers increased to ten men, he judged it with his eyes

glancing as he ran. All of them looked awfully rough and held large handguns.

The dozen from before, all with a military gun 『Blaster』, the gun's application depended on the type of bullet used, jumped out.

"Give up... you're surrounded."

Despite hearing the tone of voice of the soldier blocking the front, the boy was completely relaxed.

Even though the bullets used were configured to be anti-riot paralysis ones, his expression didn't look like someone's at whom 10 guns were aimed at.

In front of him, a person who looked like the commanding officer of the pursuers stepped forward.

"It's about time, could you please surrender, young master."

"It's an interesting joke, Kasai. Did you think you could catch me with something of this degree?"

With a fierce smile, the boy turned his body slowly to the side.

His posture was very close to a natural stance, it wasn't enough to be called a proper stance. However, the men surrounding him could not hide that they were shaken by the keen spirit he emitted.

Of course, they were familiar with the boy in front of them. And with the fact that he should not be judged by his appearance.

They knew very well about the tremendous abilities he was hiding.

"Certainly, normally even a hundred won't be a match for the young master. However, even if we don't have a thousand with us now, we have obtained permission to use blasters against you... I think that's enough for us to win?"

"Ho~, you sure have a lot to say. I'll give you advice out of consideration of your spirit. If you want to compete with me, at least use particle cannon mode and use live ammunition. Even ten thousand paralysis bullets can't stop me."

"...then, I'll take you up on those words. Release the second restriction of the blaster, everyone use blast mode!"

"K-Kasai-san is crazy, blast mode is used against large machinery such as tanks and battleships, if it even grazes a human there will be no trace of him left."

Said one of the crew members as he spew foam from his mouth. It was just as he said. Though the particle cannon mode was the trump card and the final form of blaster, it also had limited ammo. It had the power to shoot through thick armour as if it was made from paper.

Without a doubt, it was not something intended to be used against a single human.

However, this Renjou.

Hidden behind the scenes in history ever since ancient times, a military clan that acted as mercenaries throughout the world.

And the boy was said to be the greatest genius ever among the Renjou.

"It's not someone you can hold back against... everyone, shoot to kill!"

gachari, all muzzles were directed towards him simultaneously. Even before the purple electricity appearing in front of the bullets, sparkling and crackling, the boy's expression didn't change at all.

Then the atmosphere became serious all at once——

"...my little sister is waiting. I'll have you let me pass quickly."

"Everyone, fire!!"

Along with the voice, there was a flash of light.

"....."

In the mansion of the Renjou's main family, standing in the room at the top floor of the building, was a single man.

A large man that had a body looking like Iwao, he quietly emitted a strong fighting spirit, in front of him was a katana——he picked up one of the two heirlooms of the Renjou family.

"——You came, Taiga."

"Yeah, I'm here——father."

Answering his voice, the door was blown away with a roar. Its centre was lying on the ground, squashed badly, it no longer looked like a door.

The intruder's name was Renjou Taiga.

Just as his name stated, he was one of the Renjou. The terrifying enemy that drove away 80% of the combatants in Renjou's main house that day. And met with his enemy, Renjou's 33th generation's family head, Taiga's adoptive father, Renjou Gouki.

"Your determination is... unchanged."

"Although I feel indebted to you for bringing me up, that has been paid off a long time ago. It may be selfish of me, but I will live where I want, and do what I want. Am I wrong?"

"You're wrong. Even if our blood does not flow through your veins, all of Renjou lives in your body. You are the testament of our clan, that's why you are not allowed to go. More precisely, you're too dangerous to be allowed to go."

shichin, the sharp sword was drawn from its sheath. One that's classified as a nodachi, a large sword with nearly a meter long blade.

This blade that could cut a human apart, was directed towards Taiga.

"_____"

"_____"

Not a single word was spoken.

Both of them looked for a chance to take down the other, they predicted each other's actions.

The sword wielding Gouki, and Taiga without a weapon. Gouki had the advantage.

And——it was suddenly settled.

Without any visible trigger, both figures jumped in at the same time, a fist shot out at the same time as the katana slashed.

The blade's edge didn't reach the boy, it flew towards the sky in vain. And from Gouki's mouth... crimson red liquid was spit on the floor.

"...as expected...even unarmed...guh..."

"Sorry father, I've held back so you won't die."

Taiga muttered with his left fist embedded in Gouki's side, he pulled his fist away.

After receiving the blow, his father's body rolled to the floor casually. He barely retained consciousness, and his eyes were thinly opened.

"...what do you...plan...to do now..."

"Pack up and leave, I came here because I forgot something."

He replied dutifully to the hoarse voice, he took the other heirloom in his hands and swung it. He clenched his hand on its grip to make sure it felt familiar.

"Probably, we won't meet ever again."

"Is that...so..."

That was what he conveyed in the end, and calmly walked away. Some people who lack information might think there was a bad relationship between them because they're not blood-related.

However, between two warriors, the winner didn't have anything to tell to the loser, and the loser could only remain silent——

After 8 long years, they could finally relate to each other, until the end, that wasn't the case.

"...I've lived here for 8 years, I've grown attached in a way."

After defeating his father, and taking down all his pursuers, he finally regained silence.



Taiga's figure was visible in the forest. Sky-blue eyes that would not disappear, could be seen even in darkness, staring.

Renjou's house was already far away.

After looking behind at it, as if burning the scene in his eyes in the end, he started walking once again.

"I'm no longer Renjou Taiga. My name is——"

"I'm no longer Karasuba Fuyuki. Little Sister's name is——"

"Tenryo Taiga."

"Tenryo Fuyuki."

The time that stopped for the siblings 8 years ago, started flowing once more.

Chapter 1 - Moving In, School, and The Cyber World

Part 1

A remote city that has significantly developed in the few recent decade.

The most important factor that allowed it to develop would be the presence of the 《Kiritou Group》 a conglomerate that has its headquarters in this land.

It came down to the point where the city's management was no longer done by the government, instead it was done by Kiritou now which resulted in the city benefiting greatly.

From establishing new schools, the most advanced Elysion that its foundation, and second life of many people. It seemed like Kiritou cast their shadow on all of it.

Because of all that, it was now called: New City.

And now, in a town like that, a boy starts his new life——

"Hey you, what do you have wrapped on your back there?"

"Ah, this is just a bamboo sword okay? It's nothing dangerous alright?"

He was caught by the police in front of the station.

Stations were common routes for bringing in dangerous materials, so a police box's window was installed where the traffic was greatest.

It was right before noon, a policeman watching the ticket gate happened to find a boy. Although he was normally dressed, he had a slender, one meter long wrapping strapped on his back——in modern times it was obvious to be wary of unknown things like that.

"A bamboo sword? Even though it's this heavy?"

"Yeah—...look, it's this heavy because the core is made out of metal! It has a pretty good feel because of that!"

"Well, for the time being, why don't you show it to me?"

"....."

"....."

"...farewell!"

"Hey brat! Don't run away!"

But even though he said that, he couldn't catch the boy.

The boy couldn't pull out a blade that was a perfectly dangerous weapon. It was already a miracle that he arrived there without getting caught.

The boy, who rushed through the crowd with large steps was——Tenryo Taiga.

While carrying a nodachi that weighted a few kilograms, he ran like the wind, shaking off the police officers that followed him in the blink of an eye.

After leaving the crowd he continued to run for a while until he made some distance, and finally took a breather.

"Haa—, to think I was suddenly spotted. This thing stands out after all, I didn't notice it before because at Renjou's it was normal to carry these."

In fact this boy, was probably lacking common sense.

"Well, I'll just break through with force if I have to. After all, it's just police."

Correction, even if it wasn't just police, he would still do it.

Although he remembered the directions from the station, if he went back now he would meet those policemen again. Thus he judged that the best way to proceed would be by operating the device attached to his wrist——and he started the window.

On the map of the New City, his position was displayed as a red dot. Taiga looked at the illusory map visible only to him, and memorized the geography of the area.

"U—mm, the destination is... here."

There was a blue marker on the map located about five minutes by foot away from his position. And written on top of the marker was 『Little sister is here』 with a very lousy handwriting. Taiga slowly started to walk in that direction.

As expected of New City, every building was modern and clean.

Taiga who lived in seclusion before looked around curiously sightseeing like a country hick.

He walked like that and finally his destination came into view (it took him twice as long because of sightseeing).

"It was the top floor wasn't it..."

It was a mansion that stood in the corner of the area with expensive homes, also it was within the walking distance from the station. There were only two apartments on each floor, and each was classified as a luxurious apartment. It was clearly different from all other buildings surrounding it.

"...uwaa— that Fuyuki, she really splurged on this. Will our funds hold out?"

Even though Taiga earned a decent amount of money while doing various requests at Renjou's, it would still be hard to buy an apartment in this mansion.

He walked past by the perfectly clean reception desk, and entered the elevator aiming for the top floor.

ding—The arrival at the highest floor was announced with a light electronic sound, after which the door opened.

"Beep—beep—. Warning. The owner of this apartment is currently moving in. People unrelated to moving in are asked to leave."

"People related are to finish their work and leave quickly as well."

"Requesting brain wave authentication."

"Yes yes... there you go."

He saw an automatically-controlled machine approach him the moment he set a foot on the floor, a 《Drone》——the small flying machine——was a terminal the brain waves confirmation was supposed to be sent to.

The vein authentication, fingerprint authentication... there were many methods of authentication, and now the mainstream was brainwave authentication. It was possible to identify individuals by the information measured with the terminal.

"Authentication complete. Confirmed to be the current resident Tenryo Taiga. Please come in."

After saying that, the egg-like robot went back to work as if nothing happened.

There was a lot of luggage piled up nearly reaching the ceiling in the hallway, it seemed like the moving in work just started. A dozen of drones were taking them into the apartment one after another.

Honestly speaking, they looked creepy, like some kind of insects.

"Technically speaking, drones were always my enemies..."

Though, the military drones armed with blasters weren't as fancy as these. He destroyed thousands of small, medium, and large sized ones. Truth be told, he almost reflexively cut down the security drones deployed around the city before.

Even though he got used to them being deployed in the city now, the old habits don't die easily.

While avoiding the white eggs moving to and from, he entered the apartment through the wide-opened door. There was only one apartment on the top floor. The other part of the floor was taken by a garden.

Because of that, the cost of the top floor was accordingly higher.

"As expected of Fuyuki. She chose a good place."

Both Fuyuki and Taiga came from different fields, but both of them were taken in by prestigious families. After taking a hurried look around, he was quite pleased with the apartment.

He looked at the floor plan on the terminal. There was a living room, bathroom, a dining room combined with kitchen, a toilet, and four rooms in addition to a dressing room and a washroom. Two rooms would be left over even after they moved in.

Well, one could be used as a storage room.

There was a large amount of luggage piled up in the hallway. Since Taiga didn't have much personal belongings, about 70% of the luggage was Fuyuki's. He didn't think that much luggage would fit in her room.

"———, ——, ———"

Suddenly, he heard a voice.

Even among the racket made by the moving in work, his attention was clearly attracted to the cool voice. Taiga put a hand on the doorknob of the room he heard the voice from.

clank——He turned the doorknob slowly, opening the door.

"Ah..."

There was a girl who bathed herself in the daylight that entered through the window.

Her black hair shined brilliantly in the sunlight contrasting with her snow white skin. The eyes of the girl who turned around had the colour of a never-ending sky.

"——I'm back. It's been a while, Fuyuki."

"Yes. It's been eight years, Brother. Little Sister was eagerly waiting for this moment."

Greeted with a blooming smile, the siblings were reunited.

Apparently she was speaking with someone. She closed the terminal's window and faced towards him.

"You're quite late. No wonder the police was suspicious of you when you're dressed like that."

"Wait a moment, why do you know that meine Schwester?!"

"Little Sister has been observing Brother ever since he left Renjou's by hacking into the monitoring devices everywhere."

"Could you stop coming up with crimes so easily?!"

"Hmph, such hurtful words. Little Sister was just worried about her brother who doesn't know the outside world."

She pouted slightly in a way that miraculously blended childishness and adult charm, Taiga's heart skipped a beat taken by surprise.

Even though they were a twin brother and sister, they didn't speak face to face for eight years (except for remote communication). The gap between the image of her as a child and the current one was too big, if he wasn't careful he could see her as someone of the opposite sex.

That's how beautiful Fuyuki has become.

"What is it, brother? Did Little Sister do anything wrong?"

"Ah, no... it might be a little late, but you really grew up."

"That's Little Sister's line. Even though you were tall in the past, brother has really grown too much."

"No, it's just you not growin——"

"——Suddenly, Little Sister was bullied. Brother, sit down in seiza over there right now!"

"Eh? Suddenly wha——"

"Sit down."

"...yes."

He succumbed to the black pressure that emanated from her small body.

A mere minute after he reunited with his little sister, a ridiculous situation where the brother was ordered to sit in seiza happened, it could be said that his honour gave him no choice but to do it.

He reaped what he sowed.

"Listen brother. This little sister certainly is shorter than average, but she's just fifteen years old, there's still more room for growth."

"Yeah, that's certainly possible."

The possibility wasn't 0%. Still, it was just a dream.

"In the first place, if the twin brother has grown that tall, it's possible that the little sister will also grow taller. One year, just one year in a growth period is enough to——"

"No, the growth of men and women differs right? In the first place, I'm not that tall, just a little taller than average?"

"..... *rub rub*"

"Ouch, it hurts! Don't scratch me with your toes!"

"An attack of Little Sister who is so small. is like a mosquito bite isn't it."

She was quite angry. But suddenly her expression got unexpectedly gentle.

Taiga was puzzled by her sudden change of mood. His little sister was definitely angry just now.

"What is it?"

"Nothing... even though we reunited after eight years, it's as if we were always together."

"...because we are siblings, isn't it."

"——Yes."

It was quite an embarrassing, but a cosy atmosphere.

What if it becomes awkward——is what the two of them secretly thought earlier, but that insecurity was gone before they knew it.

Fuyuki looked into Taiga's eyes and bended her knees, their eyes of exactly the same colour made contact and she slowly approached him.

"...umm... wait... hey..."

Fuyuki was an incredibly beautiful girl. Although she was quite small, despite being her brother he admired her refined features that were like the crystallization of art.

Fuyuki's face, with her cherry-blossom coloured lips captured Taiga's gaze and wouldn't let go.

Her lips slowly approached the unmoving brother slowly and provocatively——moved right beside his face, and closed on Taiga's ear.

"Brother, moving in might take a little longer so let's go out for lunch."

She whispered with a voice like a bell, penetrating his brain, and backed off immediately.

Somehow, he was oddly disappointed by that curt attitude——

"What is it, Brother? Maybe you wanted a kiss?"

"N-n-nn-nn- no way in hell! We're siblings, siblings!"

"Why don't I tell you something good, Brother."

Fuyuki approached him once again, she stopped at a distance at which their lips almost touched.

"——Kissing with your little sister is not forbidden by law, you know?"

"—————!!!!"

Momentarily, his blood started boiling.

The same as his own, Fuyuki's pupils clearly saw through his inner thoughts.

The red tongue crawling over the glossy red lips dulled his ability to think.

"Blushing like that... Brother is so cute."

A finger that was like white porcelain stroked his cheek. He was strongly hugged and his lips were almost stolen, but his reason kicked in, he grasped her shoulders and separated the himself from her by force.

"D-d-dun make fun of your brother t-too much."

He was incredibly shaken.

And Fuyuki just looked satisfied as she found it interesting how her brother was shaken up, she pulled her body up obediently standing up.

"Little Sister is satisfied. Let's stop the teasing at this."

"It's too much for my heart..."

"Fufu, Brother seems not accustomed to girls."

"Uh... because all I did at Renjou's was training, there was no opportunity for that. Even I want to have a girlfriend or two——"

"Brother, don't get too full of yourself and cheat. You'll die you know?"

"...I don't really get it, but I'm very sorry."

He apologized profusely to Fuyuki who made a gesture as if she twisted something with both of her hands.

Although calmly thinking about it, there was no way she could do such a thing with her thin arms, but the thirst for blood he felt derailed his judgement.

"Keep your absurd remarks to yourself... it's a good time to go out for a lunch. The moving in will take a little longer, and I have someone I want to introduce to you."

The brother had no choice but to comply with his angry little sister. And that aside, he didn't eat anything since last night anyway.

Part 2

The siblings left the mansion. It seemed like Fuyuki arrived in the city in the morning as well, she kept walking by relying on the terminal's map for directions.

It was a holiday, so a lot of young people could be seen here and there in the city, within them were pairs that were dating. There was a school nearby, so there was a lot of people who were the same age as them.

"Haa〜"

It's a holiday indeed, is what he thought after he saw that and sighed. It was not a sigh caused by negative feelings, but one that came from pure novelty.

"Did something happen brother?"

"Mm, no... it's just, this is how a normal holiday is, huh. At Renjou during holidays I was just immersing myself in training."

In the house at which those who reached the top of military gathered, there was no concept of holiday. It wasn't necessary for Taiga either, it was the first time for him to experience the 'Holiday-like' feeling.

"You've led a really lonely lifestyle, haven't you."

"I didn't really feel lonely. It was fun becoming stronger, and it's not like I was always alone."

He thought about the days he kept training.

Moving with all he had, every day he swung his sword until the skin on his fingers wore out.

He kept seeking strength, everything he did was for that sake.

Before he noticed, he was called the strongest, and surrounded by subordinates.

It would be a lie if he said he didn't enjoy it. It would be a lie if he said he didn't regret abandoning those days.

Even so——being able to stay together with his little sister, he didn't hesitate.

Because his strength, commitment, and will, were obtained all for her sake.

"Ah, it's here brother." And she stopped walking next to him.

Three minutes on foot from their apartment. There was a two-story building by the back road on the side of main street many cars were driving through.

"...café 《Paradise》?"

Even though it was called a café, it had a little grown-up feel to it, like a restaurant. At the first glance it felt more like a bar to be accurate——it didn't have the glamour a café should have.

"Hmm certainly, it's just like Rucchan said, it's mainly older people who come. Students wouldn't really enter it."

"...Rucchan?"

Though it was probably a nickname, he wasn't familiar with it.

"It's the person I wanted to introduce you to. Sorry."

During holidays, normal restaurants earn quite a lot. However this store was more like a bar located in a backalley, and because of that, there were no customers.

"Welcome to 《Paradise》 ...! Hey, ain't it Fuyuki!"

"That's quite an attitude you show your customers, Rucchan. As a waitress. You might want to show the bare minimum of courtesy."

"Ahaha, we're friends so dat's okay isn't it? So... is that the rumoured Onii-san?"



Welcoming the siblings with unhesitating voice, seemingly same age and talking friendly with Fuyuki who always had a severe fear of strangers was——

"...a maid?"

"Not a maid, a waitress."

It was a complete and perfect maid. Not one of those fake maids with high exposure that are popular these days, wearing an apron dress hiding everything down to her knees, and she had a tasteful, detailed white prim in her hair.

By the way, the thought 'seemingly same age' was caused by her unusually incredible body growth as compared to the little sister that stood next to him. Even though the neat maid exposure was small, the feminine bulges could be seen, and his eyes were drawn to her devilish charm.

"Brother, any more and your eyeballs will be crushed?"

——He was busted, and diverted his gaze at the speed of light.

The little sister he reunited with was somewhat dangerous, the brother cried out in secret.

And, the maid girl held out her hand to him. He understood that it was for a handshake, and overlapped his hand with hers.

"Nice to meet you for the first time, name's Saionji Rui, I've been getting along as friends with Fuyuki for four years now."

"I'm Tenryo Taiga, Fuyuki's brother. Nice to meet you, Saionji-san."

"Non non, rather than Saionji-san, call me Rui-san. I'll also call you Taiga."

"...that's high tension ー. Also, why french?"

"Rucchan, could you keep your distance from Brother?"

In addition to previously jabbing at Taiga who was lost in thought unconsciously, Fuyuki gave a warning-like advice to her best friend, that encounter was depressing in various ways for her. But, Rui complained.

"No, I've heard so much from Fuyuki it doesn't seem like he's a stranger to me at all. Hey, it's fine, right?"

"...if you want to get along, then you're welcome."

"Yes! It's decided! I'll be in your care from now on Taiga!"

"Yeah, I'll be in your care, Rui."

It was a quite good feeling, so he was swallowed up by the momentum. This kind of thing is not bad——is what Taiga thought. Because his sister was scared of strangers, so the one to pull the other along was always him. A situation where he was the one pulled, was quite fresh.

"Mmm——Little Sister is quite jealous..."

Fuyuki got angry, she stood beside and pinched him, but it didn't hurt so he ignored it.

The fact that he found her cute when angry was a secret.

"Well, now that the greetings are over——welcome to 《Paradise》 ! Do you want a lunch?"

"Please get us something recommended."

"Take these seats then!"

The maid waitress guided them to bar-like counter seats in the back of the store. Those seats made it look even less like a café.

And across the counter, in a place that looked like the kitchen, was a dandy old man who looked like a barman.

"Welcome... are you Rui's friends?"

"Even his voice is like that... is this really a café?"

"Don't be so rude to people you just met, Brother. Well, certainly I can see a lot of bottles with liquor there."

"Ahaha— certainly, the only thing here that's café-like is Rui-san."

Even she agreed with that opinion, and naturally the barman-like owner ignored it.

"Hey, Rui——"

"Yeah, the order is two lunch courses, dad."

"...got it."

The owner gave up on defending his café and started cooking. The daily menu for the lunch course was made depending on the day's mood, this time it was omelet with rice, salad and soup.

Taiga observed the owner cook with finesse (honestly, it didn't suit the store) from his counter seat.

Renjou's ate only Japanese food so western food was a rare thing for him, his eyes looked sharp like raptor's because of hunger.

Rui brought them wet towels, and water which they drank right away.

"Dad might look like that but his cooking is really good, so look forward to it okay?"

"Is this your home Rui?"

"Yup, that's it. We run it together the three of us, mom, dad and me. That's the owner and the chef, Saionji Jyugo."

The siblings bowed to Jyugo who just raised a hand in greeting because he was busy cooking. That moment, the two of them decided in their hearts——to call him Master.

Since there were no other customers, Rui decided to sit by their side as well——the order they sat in was, starting from the right; Fuyuki, Taiga and Rui ——and they engaged in silly conversation for a while longer.

The dishes lined up in front of them not only looked delicious, but in fact were delicious.

Fuyuki gobbled everything up, and Taiga who got three refills was also satisfied. After a meal they enjoyed a cup of tea.

"Why aren't you commenting on the fact that it's Japanese tea?"

"It's Rui-san's hobby〜."

"It messes up the shop's atmosphere doesn't it."

For some reason, his little sister insisted he did that, though she might have been so harsh because her brother's eyes were glued to the maid's ample bust.

It seemed like Master went to prepare things for the evening in the back, there was a stylish atmosphere with only the three of them left in store.

He talked friendly with Rui whom he just met a little while ago.

Taiga was drawn to her and didn't hold back. She acted like a proper, neat and clean, humble maid and she was hilarious at the same time. Even though it was mismatched, it added to her charm and beauty instead.

If Fuyuki was moon, then Rui was sun. If Fuyuki was winter, Rui would be spring.

They were polar opposites, but because of that they complemented something each of them was missing.

"...I see, that's how it is."

"Did you say anything, brother?"

"No, nothing. By the way, what are we going to do now? Moving in isn't done yet."

He checked the situation on the terminal, it seemed like carrying in large luggage went slowly, and it was taking more time than expected.

"Hmm. If you want brother, we can visit the school. Because we didn't come to school for a week after enrolling, we should at least say hello there."

"Hmm that may be so, I guess it's bad for freshmen not to show up for a week after enrolling."

Rather than Renjou or Karasuba, the siblings entered the 『Kiritou Academy』 as Tenryo, however, they couldn't attend because they ran away from home just the other day.

"Oh, you're going to school? In that case, this Rui-san will guide you!"

"Umm, is Rui also a student of Kiritou?"

"The same cyber department's freshman, and we're in the same class too."

There was more than one school in New City, but everyone wanted to get into Kiritou.

Vacant seats of two admitted students definitely stood out. Teachers also had no contact with them, that was the first impression they had of them and were definitely bothered.

"Then, we'll leave it to you. Let's go, Brother."

"I'll change so just wait for me in front of the store okay?"

After paying (Taiga paid for all of it), they waited for Rui. While looking at the café 《Paradise》 that hardly could be called neat, he thought.

Looks like we'll be in their care from now on.

Certainly, the food was delicious.

He learned earlier that Fuyuki can't cook, he didn't know how to cook either. Although eating outside was considered expensive, this store had a reasonable pricing and it was just three minutes by foot from their home. As a bonus, there was a cute waitress——

"Brother, if you ogle Rucchan I'll kill you?"

"Are you an esper?!"

His little sister was so sharp it was scary.

Then, light footsteps and the door in the back opening could be heard, as well as a cheerful voice.

"Sorry for the wait, Fuyuki, Taiga."

"Well then, let's go to school——"

After turning around, he was stunned.

As expected, Saionji Rui was there, her chestnut-coloured wavy hair fluttered in the breeze.

Her clothes captured Taiga's gaze.

She had a camisole and a tank top on, exposing her shoulders, and sensual hot pants that exposed her captivating thighs openly.

Contrary to the maid clothing she previously wore, it was a perfectly coordinated exposure, and she had a wonderfully exaggerated 'fantastic body'. It was like a poison for his eyes.

"Please die, Brother."

"Dange—, wa-wait don't try to seriously blind me!"

"Silence. Brother who looks at girls other than his little sister is a bastard that should just die."

"Fuyuki-san?!"

Her fingertips aimed at his eyes without any hesitation. Seriousness could be felt from the arm that was thrust at him quietly.

"Ahahaha, a violence between siblings."

"This——isn't a laughing matter!"

Even though he was happy seeing her jealous and found it cute, he would like it if she spared him the violence. Because he was trained thoroughly, he found out that would be dangerous if it hit.

"Leave it at that, Fuyuki. If we don't hurry up the crowd is going to gather."

"Grr—... it's Rucchan's fault in the first place, but let's end it here. Because Little Sister is forgiving."

When he wondered how was Little Sister that tried to blind her brother forgiving, she subtracted her hand for the time being, and Rui took them to the station.

Since it was a holiday, the station was crowded. In the middle of people like that, as expected the two beautiful girls stood out, and were quite eye-catching.

Especially when they sandwiched a boy between them as an extra.

"They're going to poke a hole in me with their gazes..."

"Really, how uncomfortable. Little Sister isn't an attraction."

"There's no choice but to give up, is there?"

""Don't want to hear it from the one who stands out the most!""

Voices of the siblings resounded in wonderful splendid unison.

Majority of the gazes were those of men, and more than a half of them was directed at her exposed beautiful skin.

They didn't complain any more, since it couldn't be helped, they silently ignored the gazes. they were held up for a moment at the ticket gate terminal, and went to the station's yard. It was a gateway of the New City, a lot of Kiritou Academy's students and business district workers used it, so it was extremely large. This incredibly advanced station was managed mostly by drones instead of station staff.

The exclusive direct line with the school was mostly devoid of passengers because of the holiday, to the extent where the platform was nearly empty.

"A dedicated line connecting with home. That's really luxurious."

"That's because both the school and the train station were made by Kiritou. Also, there's a lot of students in Kiritou Academy, so if not for this it would be hard to get to school on time."

"As expected of Kiritou, that's really grand isn't it."

After waiting a few minutes they boarded the linear train that emitted a loud sound after arriving, and just continued to vibrate afterwards. After stopping in the middle of the station, the linear picked people up and continued to the destination.

The destination was, 『Kiritou Academy Entrance』 .

Kiritou is currently encompassing many projects, and a lot of them are associated with cyber world. That's why they made a professional department in high school that specializes in cyber-related things, they develop human resources by using education to get future employees. Speaking of which, more than half of the graduates seem to be employed by Kiritou.

"Cyber department is in the west block, let's go."

Fuyuki walked smiling with a stretched school map on the terminal in front of her. While it wasn't needed since Rui was guiding them, walking on your own while looking at the map was the best way to memorize it. Taiga also walked while comparing it with the map he expanded the same way.

"...looks like this school isn't too easy on the students. Little Sister doesn't have much stamina."

"Ain't that fine. If you're in a pinch you have a reliable Onii-san to help you."

"That's true. Brother, carry me."

"Don't rely on me from the get go..."

Carrying his little sister around the school would be too embarrassing.

—— 『Don't want to』 , nor 『Impossible』 , he didn't neither of these because he was too soft on his little sister. He wouldn't hesitate to do it if he had to.

The amount of necessary equipment was considerably larger as compared to other departments, so the number of school buildings it had was bigger. There were much more school buildings in front of them than there were for other departments.

"How much further do we have to go..."

"It can't be helped. Academic affairs building's in the back."

Ever since they left the train station, they have passed by five school buildings. Fuyuki who claimed to have poor physical strength started to lose her breath.

If it goes on he will really have to carry her——as Taiga thought that seriously, both Rui and the terminal informed them that they arrived at their destination.

""Excuse us!""

They bowed and left the staff room. They closed the door and all three of them sighed.

"Looks like the principal is on a business trip..."

"I was unexpectedly nervous～"

"Hmm, I didn't think that my sister would be the grade's top student."

He thought there will be a need to explain themselves to the teachers, but it was beyond his expectations.

No, it might've been because of his little sister.

It was simple. Tenryo Fuyuki is a very talented person, she topped the entrance exam this year and was selected as the freshmen's general representative.

A freshman general representative is an honour student that represents the entire school year. Going truant for a week after enrolling, there's no way that wouldn't be a problem. It seemed like it became a big fuss that involved the principal and every vice-principal from other departments.

"If it's like that we were lucky that he wasn't there..."

Even Rui, who wasn't a concerned party like the siblings, was scolded. They could only apologize to her.

They couldn't do anything even if they stood there forever, so the three of them left the academic affairs building. After thinking for a moment about what to do, Rui proposed.

"Since we're here let's look around the classrooms?"

Taiga refused saying not interested, but Fuyuki was curious, so the two of them went towards the specialized classroom and Taiga just wandered around.

"But there's hardly anything to look at, eh—"

It was just a school, everything was brand new and there wasn't anything special about it.

Maybe he should have gone with the other two even if he had no interest, Taiga regretted his choice. For the time being he decided to enter some school building out of curiosity.

The building was completely empty. It looked like it was rarely used, he didn't really know what to look at in classroom filled with things he didn't recognize.

"This, and that, just what are they used for... and... this is——"

Between them, was a machine that looked familiar. It was big enough to be barely fit in both hands. It had a shape of dodecahedron with a large number of lenses embedded next to each other on its surface.

He remembered how to start it, and found the switch by touch. A pale light flowed from the moving lens, and the walls were covered with mysterious space one after another.

"It's a holographic projector after all. Even Renjou's no longer use this thing—"

It's no longer necessary because everyone has a terminal with a small projector with them, it was a machine that projected a 3d image in a

predetermined range. Some time ago they used this to make a wide range holograms appear.

But it was a previous generation machine after all. Also, it seemed like it was broken, a loud noise could be heard from it as it projected a hologram.

Because of that his mood worsened and he tried to turn it off, but then he saw a small girl on the edge of his view.

"——Just now."

It was just for a moment, but it was... an incredibly strange girl.

A fantasy-like figure, she had fluttery clothes, and if fairies were to exist, she would definitely be one.

Somehow becoming concerned with the girl's figure, he chased after her into the back of the school building. Apparently she was a holographic projection since her figure blurred together with the noise.

He eventually reached the room located deep within the school building. The projector's power has gone down, and the girl's figure disappeared in the thin air.

Obviously, even if he looked around, he wouldn't be able to find her.

"...what the hell am I doing..."

He calmed himself down. To begin with, seeing a whole body of a person projected by a hologram was not uncommon, like the long-distance face-to-face conversations.

Just as he wanted to go back to the other two, he heard a voice from the room in front of him.

He wondered if the wall was sound-proofed, since the voice was really faint. Taiga wouldn't notice it if not for his sharp five senses. He opened the doors a little and looked inside.

Without any real purpose, he just pressed the door lightly a little curious of the whisper from inside.

——just a moment later he realized it was the wrong choice.

"Excuse m——"

"Aghhhh come onnnnn——! What's with that bald vice principal! 『"The first year representative is not coming, what's happening?"』 I don't know either! Do something about it yourself! I'm busy so stop bringing me any more trouble!"

Suddenly hearing a loud voice Taiga stopped his legs.

No, it wasn't actually because the voice was loud, it was because the individual inside was incredibly selfish.

The voice owner seemed like a ladylike, neat looking female student and as a bonus, she howled loud enough for her voice to reach the heavens. If it turned out to be the fairy-like girl from before, he wouldn't be at a loss for words.

The female hologram that disappeared after his projector battery went down, was probably displayed on the girl's terminal and responded with a deadpan expression.

〈"Master. I am not here to listen to Master's complaints you know?"〉

"It's fine, just listen to me for a while. In the first place, the teachers rely on me too much——"

〈"Master. You told me something similar the other day."〉

Taiga quietly closed the door.

".....let's go back."

He'll pretend he didn't see anything—— he didn't know who that was, but the person talking with the hologram seemed to have a grudge against them. Seeing that scene by an accident will definitely turn into something troublesome.

Without making any sound, he left that place. But he couldn't get rid of those two's figures from his head for a while.

"Haa~, unexpectedly it was time well spent."

"No matter how long I've stood here you two wouldn't come back..."

"Little Sister got a little bit too obsessed over there... how dreadful, the Kiritou Academy."

The three of them were back at the central station's ticket gate at about three p.m. the trip to school and back took them about two hours.

"Well then, it's about time to enter the main event of the day."

"So it is."

"What main event?"

"...there's actually something I kept secret from Brother. It's pretty important."

"Mm? Something you couldn't tell me?"

"Yes. Actually... I spent too much for our new home, so we don't have enough to cover the living costs."

"——Ha?"

"That's why, umm... the living expenses prepared by Brother and Little Sister, are in a serious pinch."

"Ha?! Wasn't that more than enough for two people?!"

"It couldn't be helped! It's a home for Brother and Little Sister to live in! Little Sister was just a little bit too trigger happy when spending, so no-one will blame her right? You can't do it right?!"

"Why are you asking a rhetorical question?"

"Little Sister is reflecting on her actions, but she doesn't regret buying that apartment."

The amount of money Fuyuki and Taiga earned after being separated, was considerably big, but after subtracting tuition, admission fees, and other miscellaneous costs it didn't give them much room to maneuver.

That thought passed through Taiga's head.

"...oh well, what's done is done. So, how is the lack of money related to the main event?"

"To summarize it in few words it would be, introduction teaser for work."

"An invitation to the part-time work in Elysion—something like that."

"...a part-time work?"

Hearing an unfamiliar term, Taiga asked.

"Come on, hurry up brother. Come this way."

"Don't pull me, don't pull me. I can walk on my own."

Five minutes later they separated with Rui who said 『"Then, see you over there—"』, and they arrived at their new home. The Drones doing the moving work were gone, but before he could take a good look he was pulled by his little sister again.

He looked at Fuyuki beside him who made excited noises smiling in euphoria and led him to one of the rooms in their home——they stepped into a room Fuyuki named 『Dive Room』.

There were several illuminated machines inside. A number of cables could be seen on the floor... it was a type of room he has never seen before when he was at Renjou's.

"...umm it feels hot and yet cold."

"What's with that weird description? I don't get what you want to say."

The cooling was attached to avoid overheating of the equipment, it was the first time Taiga felt an unpleasant sense of both temperatures interweaving.

"Brother, please sit on that chair."

"——This is arclight, right?"

"Yes. It's immersion dedicated equipment with a program that sends human consciousness into Elysion, commonly known as 『Arclight』."

Generally homes have small sized headgear types of it, but that was a medium-sized machine used by companies.

A number of wires converged with two chairs as their destination. Feeling like a capsule, it covered the head completely after sitting down.

After sitting as he was told to, Fuyuki who sat on the chair opposite and directed him how to activate arclight.

"First, press the power button with your right hand, yes that one. An authentication window will come up in front of you, please authenticate your brainwaves with the terminal."

Releasing the locking, he proceeded. There were a lot of troublesome settings on the first start——connecting it with the terminal, and the personal mental structure authentication——after a few minutes all the settings were finally set up, and there was a complete reboot.

"Now we're going to dive into Elysion. Are you prepared, brother?"

"Mm, wait a moment. Let me take a deep breath——"

"Counting, 3 - 2 - 1."

"Wai—, Fuyuki-san?!"

"Dive start!"

Together with a surprise countdown attack, Taiga's consciousness fell into darkness.

Part 3

——He saw a light.

His field of view started to flicker and changed rapidly. And the light came projecting his entire body, projecting the structure of a human named Tenryo Taiga.

All his five senses together with appearance information like weight and height, all of it turned into data.

Floating in front of him, was a doll without any distinguishing features.

Even though it was a human being, the body had no individuality. It had no consciousness, and no features.

Into it, the individual mental structure was built in.

——— Nerve connection start ———

click, his view changed.

While other senses still remained, his vision changed to that of the doll.

——— Visual tuning complete, starting auditory tuning ——

Hearing followed, and touch after that, other senses gradually switched one after another into those of the empty shell's, but he still couldn't lift a finger.

——— Mental structure transplant completed ——

And finally, together as his 『Heart』 was transferred with consciousness, the doll turned into a 『Body』. The light slowly faded, and all he could see was endless darkness.

——— Starting logging into 《Aries》 structure, passkey authentication start ——

"——Eh?"

Suddenly, his senses became sharper.

Before he noticed, he cried out, it was only natural since suddenly, both of his feet were firmly attached to the ground. His closed eyelids reacted to the light outside, and convulsed slightly.

Legs, knees, hips, belly, elbows, he checked all of his senses up to fingertips.

"...okay."

He slowly opened his eyes.

Fuyuki and Rui looked at him from a super-close distance.

"Uwaoahhhhhh!!!"

He instantly backstepped with a tremendous force.

"...now, how many meters did he jump back?"

"He easily jumped back about five meters..."

The two beautiful girls commented after seeing him make a leap beyond a limit of human body. But, it couldn't be helped since suddenly he saw beautiful girls at a distance where their lips touched him.

"W-wh-why are you so close! You surprised me!"

"No~, it's just that Taiga had his eyes closed so I was worried."

"I wondered if there was any trouble with your first log-in."

"Ugh..."

Being told that, he couldn't talk back.

Certainly, if he continuously kept his eyes closed they'd worry, especially after he just entered Elysion——

"...is this the Elysion?"

"Indeed, brother. It's your first experience with Little Sister."

"Stop saying it like that."

He retorted to his sister, who grinned like a cheshire cat. Once again he felt uncomfortable in the world he was in now, and he looked around.

It was a large forest, like one of the ones that were destroyed in the modern times, the large tree trunks that extended above his head no longer existed in the real world, the foliage was blocking the light of the sun.

"_____"

Unconsciously, he was at a loss for words.

It was a scene impossible to find in reality, he couldn't believe it.

A breeze shook the leaves, a fragrant smell came from natural plants, sounds of life could be heard all over, he could feel it with all of his five senses.

"...woah."

It had felt really realistic. He already had knowledge about the virtual world——but he was still surprised by the cyber world that projected itself directly connecting with brain nerves.

Elysion——a world of electrons almost everyone used these days. It's a lifeline of everyone from administration to security, it was even used in investigations and entertainment, it became an indispensable world to everyone. It was like a second utopia from the mythology.

He walked up to the big tree nearby, and touched it with his palm.

It had a rough feel of real wood. He put some strength in his muscles, and a piece of trunk popped out.

snap——he took the broken piece into his hand, but the weight unexpectedly disappeared. It vanished into thin air, the piece of wood faded away rustling and became small particles. Seeing that he made sure and he said "Right, this isn't reality after all".

"Did something happen, brother?"

"No... wait a moment. I just noticed but, what's up with those clothes?"

"Really, noticing it this late. This is not the real world, so wearing appropriate clothes is obvious right?"

"Mufun", Fuyuki puffed out her chest, her clothing was something——that looked like a kimono. Its bottom looked like a dress, it was toned black with red peonies drawn on it, it looked well combined with her glossy black hair.

"How is it, does it suit me?"

Standing next to his kimono wearing sister was Rui, her clothing was strange as well. The bottom were hot pants, and the top was a white coat on top of the skimpy tank top. At first he thought it was a normal coat, but it was more like the white clothing scientists wear in labs.

"...let's take a hundred step back and ignore the kimono. But why a lab coat?"

"It's Rui-san's hobby."

"Brother, why are you overlooking the fascinating kimono of your sister. Please compliment it more."

"No, umm... I have problems commenting."

In terms of feminine curves, Fuyuki has a terribly sorry figure compared to other girls of the same age. However, a kimono's fit people without curves. Also, as Fuyuki smiled devilishly it brought out a somewhat roguish atmosphere.

To put it simply, it was incredibly seductive.

"Fufufu, this little sister understands everything just by looking at your face."

"...no, I just admired——"

"Oh, did you just self-destruct now? Oo—oh, this siscon."

"I'm not a siscon!"

No, no matter how you looked at it, he was a siscon.

"By the way brother, are you not going to retort in response to your own appearance?"

"Hmm? My own appearance?"

"Look, a mirror."

"...woah, what's this."

Rui lightly shook her hand, and a window appeared reflecting Taiga's entire body.

His appearance wasn't that much different from theirs. Mixing black and white, stylish and giving him a freedom of movement—— a long coat with white as a base, and solid black pants.

"...well, it's better than having mismatched clothing."

"That, are you implying Rui-san's and the others have mismatched outfits?"

"Are you saying Little Sister's coordination is cheap?"

"Eh, did Fuyuki make this? I guess that's fine then."

"A siscon after all!"

Rui accused him teasingly.

He looked at the figures of three people, including himself. There was no sense of unity at all. If they were to appear on the streets with such outfits, it couldn't be helped if they stood out.

However, it fit this world——that's what he felt.

"Well then, let's go."



Both Fuyuki and Rui held out their hands, and looked back at him.

And like fairies, they invited him.

The moon and the sun, girls in black and white announced the beginning with a smile.

""Welcome to 《Aries》 !!""

World of those three began.

A structure.

Just one of the bubbles that form a vast world known as Elysion.

It's a small world formed within another world, it can be imagined as a single leaf of a large tree.

All structures are connected with the network, it increased to an amount that made it difficult to count them all. There are structures for electronic devices that are connected to the network, that structure connects with the city's structure, and that connects with a larger city's structure, which in turn connects with the province's structure, even the country is connected to the world's structure.

And what's most important, is to maintain control of all these structures somehow.

The lifeline controlling New City, its structure, which is also responsible for controlling structures of all personal terminals.

National, private... it has various administrators.

That's the structure 《Aries》 .

It's a huge structure the largest company related to cyber world, 《Kiritou Group》 operated. Rumour said it has something to do with the power supply for the new city. Rumours said you'll be shot if you reveal anything about it, it's a structure that has some kind of secret function.

"...hey, 《Aries》, why is it like this? Did they play around too much?"

"Not at all. There are good reasons for this."

"If the structure is just left alone, the bugs and viruses will just appear within, and since it's so large, the amount of viruses will be big as well. It's enough if administrators scan the small structures periodically, but it's not enough for a large structure like this—"

A large structure has a large system that needs to be managed, and it could not afford a chance of being stopped. And it's too large of a burden for administrators to eliminate all of the bugs.

"And that's where, an idea was proposed to make this large structure into a game."

"A game?"

"The structure doesn't use all of its computing power at all times. Since all structures are connected to the network, the excess computing power can be used somewhere else. So a game world was created that's maintained by the excess computing power which focuses on fixing the bugs and eliminating viruses."

"So the companies gather players and ask them to help eliminate bugs. Also, the players pay a monthly fee for it, so it's killing two birds with one stone."

Fuyuki's and Rui's explanation seemed to be a simplification of a bit more complicated issue, but it was roughly correct. Using the excessive computing power wouldn't make sense unless a large number of outside companies connected could use it as well.

This 《Aries》 is a new era's massive multiplayer online game.

"More specifically, how do the bugs look like?"

"Well, that depends on the structure. But generally they look like an enemy 『To be hunted』."

"So, how does that lead to the part-time job?"

"Although it can be done only with permission of an administrator, there's a bounty set for boss-class monster bugs. You get e-money for defeating it."

"Qualification is given depending on your rank and your achievements in Aries so far. Since Rucchan is one of the qualified people, Little Sister and the others are also eligible if they register as a group with her."

"...that, doesn't that disadvantage Rui?"

"Not really~, a qualification holder can't do it without at least two more people. And the reward is divided equally among the group."

"So unless you have suitable people in your group you can't go, huh."

"Correct. Since we've just invited Brother, it would be a little bit too reckless to already go for a bounty, so let's have you gain a little bit of experience."

"Okay... so, where are we going now? Training field?"

"Something like that."

The three of them walked through the forest feeling a light crispy sensation under their feet. They entered the deep darkness, the dazzling light was obstructed by the trees leaving only occasional rays of light.

He wondered for a moment if there was another way to move instantly if this wasn't the real world—, but it seemed like there was no easy way to get to their destination as they moved on foot.

"U ~mm, it was somewhere here... oh, there it is, Fuyuki."

"Hmm, yeah, it's just right for the first opponent."

"——eh, wai——, what's that?"

zuzuzu... sound was transmitted through the earth, it had a somewhat heavy vibrating physique. It didn't try to hide its existence as it moved slowly between the greenery, a pink glowing mucus dripped from it.

"...a huge earthworm?"

"Without a doubt."

Even though he kept it to himself, he thought that a more than three meter long earthworm was not an earthworm at all.

It's something that should be called a mutant or a monster.

"Well then, please go down there and defeat it."

"That's impossible meine Schwester! I don't want to touch it!"

He couldn't, he wouldn't do it, it was beyond the boy's common sense.

"It's alright, the worm is a bug that's one of the minor small fries. ...but it certainly is an organism you don't want to get too close to."

Fuyuki and Rui also felt a similar physiological aversion. He would rather slaughter a hundred rats rather than do that.

"Then brother, GO!"

"At least give me a weapon!"

It was a reasonable request. He can't just go and defeat it with his bare hands, this boy, won't even consider doing that for a second.

"Doesn't Brother have a weapon installed in his terminal already? Please don't underestimate your little sister."

"I mean, how do I take it out?"

"Please imagine it. The weapon you usually use."

"Imagine, huh."

"Somewhat like, as if you pulled out a legendary sword."

"Sorry, that's too difficult to understand."

"Oi, just go already! Rucchan!"

"Sir, yes sir!"

He was strongly pushed by the two who walked behind his back, after being pushed by two girls his body rolled forward.

The worm has noticed the sound (it didn't have eyes so it couldn't see) and looked behind.

"U—mm, a nice weather, isn't it?"

After a few seconds of standing stiff, the worm opened its mouth agape. Although he thought it had no teeth since its body was soft, it seemed more like a snake than an earthworm.

There were sharp pointed fangs made to bite and cut people's flesh. There was an incredibly thick liquid dripping from them!

click, a switch deep within his body was flipped.

He reached out to the realm of his conditioned reactions.

Sensing the enemy's hostility, his body responded with its inhuman reflexes against the threat.

He stretched out his empty hand, and clenched the handle that appeared in it.

As the enemy's neck approached, he jumped up to the worm, and while reaching half-way he slashed it feeling as if he cut mud, he instantly followed-up and cleaving the worm and bisecting it.

In Taiga's hands was a one meter long Japanese sword, classified as a nodachi.

It had a characteristic wavy blade crest.

In his left hand right next to it's cutting edge, was a sheath.

"Wow."

"As expected of Brother."

kachin, together with the sound of sword being sheathed the worm faded away turning into particles of light. Quick draw——the sword drawing skill beyond this dimension.

"Amazing! It was amazing Taiga! I didn't even see that cut!"

Rui clung to him excited, she grabbed his shoulders as she trembled and shook him. He didn't mind if she was impressed, but he wanted her to stop because his brain started shaking.

Taiga stared at his hands as he shook, looking at the nodachi in its sheath.

It appeared as his subconscious recognized the prey in front of him——the weight he has continued to wield when he was at Renjou's. Confirming it, he unsheathed the sword.

After seeing sunlight reflected on it's sharp edge, he looked up at Rui.

"How is it? How did it feel to use an attack-configured program Rui-san made?"

"...an attack-configured program?"

"Interfering with bugs and viruses, a special program made to eliminate them. Taiga's and Fuyuki's are specially made by Rui-san, normally you would have to buy one from management. It's a high performance program."

"Rucchan is an excellent creator, she can make a program more capable than ones made by the management. Brother's sword and Little Sister's design were configured by Rucchan."

"Oh, so that's why the blade looks like this."

The nodachi he showed her previously via the communication channel——its appearance was similar to his beloved sword 《Tenryuu》. But that sword was made out of ultra-rare materials, and it should be impossible to reproduce. The weight and texture would be different.

"Well then, now that you have a weapon, let's start the crash course. This time take that thing down."

"...eh?"

His little sister's finger pointed at the scenery, there was a huge mantis in the spot where the worm was before, and behind it there were a few more animals wriggling. Five in total.

"They're all small fries, so do your best."

"...ugh—"

He ran somehow losing his motivation, jumping into the flock of disgusting monsters and poised his sword.

"Taiga's amazing. He wasn't even grazed as he took them down."

"Obviously, it's Brother."

While looking from the distance as he rampaged with his sword like a storm, Fuyuki proudly praised her brother while puffing her chest. She grinned at her best friend who couldn't take her eyes off the battle – the hunt.

In the centre of that storm, was a boy who used the attack-configured program for the first time just fifteen minutes ago.

Every time he swung the sharp blade, the monster's head or body was cut. He was as fast as if he was the wind himself, the thirty animals that were there in the beginning of combat were reduced to half the amount within a minute.

"Normally, the movements made by using virtual body in beginning are sluggish aren't they—"

"Such common sense doesn't apply to Brother. His motor skills were abnormal to begin with."

Virtual body was the physical body people operated in Elysion. In the first place, its performance and appearance was based on the mental structure implanted into the doll and became their bodies——in other words, the appearance changed together with the real one. The virtual body's

movement capability was also corrected slightly depending on the structure.

"——How cool〜."

Rui muttered, words leaked from her mouth.

That was, pure envy.

Bypassing the difference of gender, a feeling like that reached her heart.

It was like a glitter of something you get in the end after doing hard work.

——That's why, she yearned for something like that.

The two watched Taiga vigorously bisect the last animal.

"Brother, it's about time to end. It's about time for that."

"Mm? Is that so?"

His little sister told him after he subdued about two hundred monsters cutting them relentlessly. Although it wasn't necessary since it wasn't reality, he swiftly cleaned his blade of impurities out of habit before sheathing it.

Although the insects were disgusting, as expected he no longer felt anything after the kill count reached three digits, somehow he felt at ease repeatedly cutting down disgusting organisms.

"Killing monsters... seems quite fun."

While he took down huge drones before, taking down a biological monster felt different from destroying a mechanical drone.

He looked up at her, she had a clear expression, and the same as his, crystal clear sky-blue eyes.

...he felt that about two hours passed ever since he started hunting. It was about time the day started to end. But there was no change in the sky above them.

"Is the passage of time not reflected on this world?"

"No, there is a night here. It's just that time flows differently."

If the time was synchronized with the real world, the students who go to school during weekdays would only play during Elysion's daytime. In order to correct such inequality, the flow of time changed at random, it was a system that reminded people of a completely different world.

"Sometimes it's ten hours from dawn till dusk, the other time it's thirty. It occasionally wrecks the body clock. Quite interesting right?"

"That's new."

I see, the sun didn't set yet because it was still daytime in this world.

"We confirmed Brother's ability. Looks like we can already start actual combat tomorrow."

"Yuppyup, it's better than expected."

Being openly praised, as expected he got embarrassed.

Deciding to end it for the day, the three of them left Elysion.

Log out——in order to return to the real world, they had to pass two procedures. Transferring the individual mental structure from the virtual body to the real one through a terminal, and transferring the consciousness to his body.

Because they would be vulnerable during that process, the three of them walked to a safe place.

"From tomorrow onwards we'll be fighting boss monsters whose strength doesn't compare with those small fries. Make sure you're prepared, brother."

"The ones from today were strong enough."

"Ahahaha, both Rui-san and Fuyuki will be there so it'll be alright."

They walked through the forest searching for the light.

He got used to their bizarre white coat and kimono, it no longer felt lacking in harmony.

The fact that it looked good on the girls in the first place worked towards it too.

"We'll be leaving the forest soon. Brother, prepare yourself okay?"

"Mm? Is there anything there?"

"It's not like a huge bear will attack the moment we leave the forest. Just enjoy the view."

Just as he was about to talk back protesting her roundabout way of speaking, suddenly they stepped out of the forest.

At the first glance he couldn't believe it,

"—————"

In just an instant, he turned speechless.

Spreading out below, was a magnificent land.

Abundant amount of flowers growing, a lot of lakes moistening the earth, soft light pouring down——all of it combined into a beautiful artwork.

The murmuring water, branches and leaves swaying in wind, breathing of various organisms——various sounds interwove creating the 『World』 , building a miniature garden.

"Awesome."

That's all that came out.

Even if you looked for one, you wouldn't find a place like this on earth, a land of fantasy. Just that, gave this world a meaning to exist.

"....."

That scenery, in that moment that felt like a miracle, the vast golden land, he burned it into his eyes.

"...log out process, start."

His little sister's voice in the background reached his ear, but he still continued to look at this world.

Before his consciousness dimmed eventually, the scenery continued to be projected into his retina.

Part 4

"Now, Brother. Let's check out our new home."

"...somehow it feels like something is overflowing inside, but let's leave that for now."

After safely returning to his body, what awaited him was a very realistic talk.

Six hours passed ever since moving in was completed, finally their new life started.

"First, the living room and the kitchen right. There's no use for the kitchen since neither Brother nor Little Sister can cook, but I wanted to prepare everything in detail."

"This certainly is detailed. It has all the cookware, and isn't that the newest kitchen system——, aren't we low on money because of things like this?"

"Shut up please."

In the living room there was a sofa four people could relax on at once, a TV type holographic projector, there were also table and chairs for four people to eat meals at.

Having already seen the dive room, they headed to their private rooms next.

Taiga's room reflected a Japanese style room. The only furniture were a wardrobe and a sturdy desk, in addition to that, there was a sword rack for both 《Tenryuu》 and a training sword.

Fuyuki's room was a western style room that was complete opposite of her brother's. Although most of the electronic devices were in the dive room, this room had some back-up and private-use equipment.

But, there was a problem. He couldn't find a bed there.

"Fuyuki, what about the bed? Did you forget to order one?"

"Do you think Little Sister would make such a mistake? There is one in another room."

Why is it in another room? He thought for a moment, but the question disappeared from his mind after he opened the next room.

He was led to the last room remaining. There was one piece of furniture that occupied nearly half of that room, moreover, there was only one purpose it could be used for.

"It was hard to find one this big, but, I somehow managed."

Spread in front of him, was a sea of brand new sheets.

It was about five times the size of a typical bed families had in their homes, the mats would make anyone who saw them want to plunge in. But he denied its existence.

It was commonly known as a king-size bed.

"...ei, meine Schwester—. What is this?"

"It's a bed."

"No, that's not what I meant."

"It's Little Sisters and Brother's love nest."

"Sorry. But Onii-chan doesn't understand."

For some reason he couldn't process what she said. Couldn't like ten people sleep on it together? But no matter how he considered that unnecessary thing, reality didn't change.

"Well then, let's go to the next room."

"Wait, please explain this to me properly."

His heart cried out beautifully.

"Why... why something like this...?"

After his first time to experience Elysion his brain seemed exhausted, they went out and ate dinner outside. After he got rid of tiredness by soaking in the bath, what was waiting for him, was an absurdly big bed.

Please wait in bed——saying that Fuyuki went to take a bath.

"A brother waiting for his little sister to get out of bath... what's up with this situation..."

He rolled around while holding his head, as if his own words hurt him. No matter how many times he rolled the disgraceful thought wouldn't disappear.

About five minutes later, he stopped rolling and lied flat. Just as he slowly got up from the bed——

"I need to run away. Some towels spread out on the ground are eno——"

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Brother."

Unfortunately, he decided too late.

Hearing a voice from behind, he realized it was too late to escape. Forcibly breaking through——was not something a siskon like him could do, his attempts at persuasion probably won't get through.

But, that situation was bad, he needed to find another method or talk his little sister out of it.

"_____"

The moment he looked back, he froze.

"Y-yo-, y-yo-y-you-"

"Are you a broken radio?"

"NO! That's not it, what's up with that outfit?!"

"...it's Little Sister's pyjama isn't it?"

"Isn't that just underwear! How is that pyjamas!"

Fuyuki came out of the bath with her long black hair freely falling, and she wore a see-through negligee that showed everything.

It felt more like it emphasized her black underwear and immature limbs rather than hid them, moonlight illuminated his grown-up sister's figure.

"Hu-hurry up and wear something!"

"There's no need for that. This is enough for Little Sister."

"Worry about the people watching you! Have some shame!"

"There's only Brother here. Also, Brother, you say that but your eyes are glued to your little sister's body."

Only after he was told that, he noticed he was staring at Fuyuki this entire time.

It should have been easy to look away from her, but for some reason he couldn't do it, her slender limbs gave off an impression of unripe fruit and added seductive atmosphere to her body.

Snickering—as her smile affected his heart like a poisonous flower, Fuyuki crawled on top of the bed.

The springs creaked as she came closer to him crawling on all fours. Her pupils reminded him of a carnivorous animal before it's prey.

"Now...
Brother,
let's sleep
together."

The springs creaked as
she came closer to him
crawling on all fours.
Her pupils reminded him
of a carnivorous animal
before it's prey.

Her slender limbs gave off
an impression of unripe
fruit and added a seductive
atmosphere to her body.



"Now... Brother, let's sleep together."

"Wait, calm down. On a bed this big there's no reason for you to approach me!"

"Won't it be warmer if we stick together?"

"If that's the case then put something on, woahh?!!"

"——Too late now."

whump, a body hit the bed softly.

On top of the bed, his little sister straddled him with a suspicious smile on her face.

Maybe it was because she took a bath, but her white skin was cherry blossom coloured, her moist, long black hair flowed over her white shoulders, and her body exuded an aroma as sweet as honey obscuring his thoughts.

Both bewitching and childish, creating a miracle piece of art.

"Nnn..."

She slowly pressed weight on him. She clung to him tightly, and he could feel her life's warmth conveyed through the thin fabric.

"You're so warm... Brotherr..."

With a childish voice, she whispered into his ear.

Her voice penetrated his brain through the eardrums, making his heart beat faster.

"Fufufu. Your heart, it beats really fast. Did you notice that?"

"H-hey Fuyuki. Wha——"

"It's completely different than how you were as a child. A tough wonderful body..."

"——I beg you stop talking!"

A finger like white porcelain entered his clothes and stroked him slowly from his belly up to his chest. Her hand wriggled around smoothly like a snake, his body's temperature increased in the places she touched.

"Why? Isn't Brother's heart pounding so hard? Isn't it going **dokun dokun** bouncing happily?"

Her captivating breathing and enticing voice assaulted his ear.

No good, I don't know why but it's getting dangerous!!

If he goes along with it, something he cannot undo will happen——his intuition sounded an alarm.

Even though he understood that, no strength returned to his exhausted body.

"We're going to school for the first time tomorrow. It'll be bad if we don't sleep properly right?"

She said after teasing him for a little longer.

But Taiga wondered if he really will be able to sleep properly.

Slowly erasing all thoughts from his mind, he forcibly closed his eyes.

But the curtains of the night, didn't come down yet.

The «Aries» structure is

MMORPG
A MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
BASED ON MEDIEVAL FANTASY.

PLAYERS VENTURE THE WORLD WHILE GETTING
RID OF THE MONSTERS CALLED BUGS AND VIRUSES
AND TREAT IT LIKE SECOND LIFE.
SPECIAL GROUPS OF PLAYERS ARE COMMISSIONED
BY ADMINISTRATION TO SUBDUE POWERFUL VIRUSES.

○ TAIGA'S WEAPON DESIGN: *NODACHI*



○ FUYUKI'S WEAPON DESIGN: *FOLDING FAN*



○ RUI'S WEAPON DESIGN: *CREATIVE STONE*



Chapter 2 - First Suppression

Part 1

chiriririririri

"...fuahh?"

A loud sound filled the air, the moment he realized it was the sound of an alarm clock, his consciousness quickly returned.

"Morning, huh."

He felt the sleepy atmosphere after waking up early, and stared at the sun that still hasn't risen fully yet already brilliantly illuminated the sky.

A soft and warm body lying on the inside of his arm moved in response to the his words.

"Geez, really, sleeping with me..."

He stroked the head of his little sister, she had a very cute expression as she slept.

Even though she was the perpetrator who disturbed his heart last night, the new environment has tired her out and she quickly fell asleep.

But, Taiga whom she was hugging the entire time, was endlessly troubled by her sweet breathing and ended up falling asleep only just before morning came.

I've only slept for about an hour... well, I've gotta do my best.

He left the bedroom while making sure he doesn't wake her up.

Even though it was April, the morning air was still chilly. Taiga went through the living room heading to the large garden that was a privilege

which came with the top floor, it was already the second day but he still didn't feel like his new life properly started.

"Fuwa~, it's a good weather."

After going outside in his training uniform he looked around from the fifteenth floor. The area was entirely comprised of tall buildings, no matter where he looked it was all the same.

He breathed in deeply, inviting cold air into his lungs.

One, two, three... counting in his mind he woke up all cells in his body, shifting into a state where he could show the best performance within three seconds.

"Okay, let's start the morning training."

Drawing the practice sword from its sheath, Taiga started working out in the tranquil morning.

"Good morning, Brother. You're lively right after waking up."

"Nn? Ah, Fuyuki. Good morning."

His little sister's voice welcomed him after he did around a thousand swings. It was already daytime, the city that spread out below was full of people and vehicles.

He sheathed the sword, pausing.

"...that's a lot of sweat, there's even steam rising."

"Well, it is training. So, what time is it now?"

"It's seven o'clock sharp, we don't have to hurry yet. Please take a shower, Little Sister has to dress herself as well."

"Got it."

Certainly, it was cold. Fuyuki who put on a jacket on top of her negligee returned to her room.

After wiping his sweat with a towel, Taiga headed straight to the bathroom. He threw his dōgi^[1] in the washing machine, set it to mist mode before pushing the start button, and quickly washed away the rest of the sweat in the shower.

It took him five minutes to finish his shower.

After changing into the uniform that was prepared beforehand, he fixed his hair while looking into the mirror.

"...this uniform looks like it would suit just about anyone."

A gray shirt, black pants and blazer, a tie. He already knew it, but it was a really ordinary uniform.

He fixed his tie to make it look better, and moved away from the spot. When he checked the time on the terminal, it was a quarter past seven.

"Looks like I took a little too long."

If they want to eat breakfast they'd better hurry. Thinking that, he grabbed the bag and headed to the front door hurriedly.

"Sorry, I made you wait."

"Little Sister changed her clothes just now as well. Let's go."

Waiting with a bag in her hands was Fuyuki *ver.* school uniform.

A dark navy blue blazer and a ribbon instead of a tie in the centre of her chest accenting it. Dazzling thighs could be seen between the black kneesocks and the skirt that was about 10 centimetres above her knees.

Also, a brand new hairstyle, her long black hair were split in two and tied with red ribbons.

"I tried going with twin-tails. How is it?"

"Mm. It really suits you."

He openly complimented her, thinking that the long black hair and twin-tails combo had a great destructive power.

"I see. A great destructive power, is it."

"...do you read minds or something?"

"Yes, but only Brother's."

"Eh, seriously?!"

His sister said something really scary.

Since they didn't have time to dilly-dally, they left their home side by side, and after confirming that the auto-lock worked they boarded the elevator.

Part 2

It was still too early to go to school, so there weren't too many people on the road. Rather than towards the station, the siblings went together towards the café 《Paradise》 for the moment.

"Welcome, you two. Breakfast is ready."

Rui greeted them after the 'closed' tag was taken down and the door opened. She wore the same uniform as Fuyuki, but its size was much bigger. Her big breasts were highly accentuated, and a glimpse of her sexy legs could be seen.

"Umm—Taiga, it's a little embarrassing when you stare at me like that..."

"Ah, no... ouch!"

"Brother... do you want me to hollow out your eyes?"

Fuyuki's shoe strongly pressured his toes. Although it was stronger than he expected from her small body, it wasn't that effective on Taiga's trained body.

"Yahaha, Fuyuki really loves Taiga a lot doesn't she〜."

"Of course. However, Brother is different. He has guts to stare at other women."

"It was unavoidable!"

Whether Fuyuki or Rui, the two of them were unusually beautiful girls. What's wrong with admiring their uniforms.

Taiga somehow calmed down the pouting Fuyuki, and they sat on the counter seats of Paradise, it was still in middle of the opening process. The order they were sitting in was the same as the previous day. From the right, Fuyuki, Taiga, and Rui.

"Come on, eat up. It's all made by the beautiful Rui-san!"

Rui urged them to start eating.

"...oh—did you really make this by yourself Rui?"

"It's really delicious. Honestly, this is unexpected."

"Grr, what's unexpected?!! Fuyuki!"

Rui's image was somewhat outdoorish, she was surrounded by a cheerful atmosphere. That a girl like her could make a brilliant pot-au-feu with golden omelet and plenty of vegetables was quite unexpected.

"That's because I'm the only daughter of café owners, I was taught how to cook. But I'm still not at a level where I can work in the café's kitchen."

The two of them, decided to eat breakfast at 《Paradise》 receiving Rui's invitation.

Last night, after they came back from 《Aries》, Fuyuki contacted Rui through her terminal and that's when she was approached with a proposal - 『"Why don't you come by for breakfast tomorrow?"』.

Her purpose was to get a third party evaluate her cooking. Even so, the siblings being conveniently offered a breakfast, took her up on it instantly.

"Yeah, it's delicious."

"Really? I'm glad."

The three of them ate the breakfast, and cleaned everything up at 7:45. After being shouted at by Master who was preparing in the back, they headed towards the station.

Unlike the other day, the platform was full of people in Kiritou Academy's uniforms waiting in a line. The column of people who commute to school first increased, and soon after it started decreasing at fast rate. Before long the trio boarded the linear. To avoid overcrowding, the train had a seat arrangement like a bullet train allowing a number of people to sit down, but there was no dissatisfaction since the trains came every two minutes.

Inverting the seats to face towards each other, three of them sat in place for four people. Fortunately, no one particularly complained about the last seat.

"You two, these will be your first classes. Cyber department's teaching speed is fast, so pay attention."

"Little Sister has room to spare."

"I... well, I'll manage somehow."

Although Taiga's grades weren't great, they were not bad either. But after enrolling in Kiritou with this department selection, he couldn't let his guard down, since it's mainly people with good grades who gather in cyber department.

There are three departments——the general studies department, sports department, and cyber department. The cyber department had capacity for five hundred students per grade, and the other two had capacity for two hundred and fifty each. Sports department was based on recommendation, and grades were irrelevant in it. The students with good grades chose either the general department or the cyber department. The majority of prospective students come to Kiritou in order to enroll in the cyber department, in fact there was usually only around two hundred and fifty people smart enough enroll in it.

In the first place, Taiga only entered the Cyber department because he followed Fuyuki.

"Somehow you say... that's unsettling."

"Little Sister is there so it'll be alright. Also, Brother is good with memorization, so I think if he uses it well, he can get average grades."

"What about Rui's grades?"

"Fufufu... you better not——underestimate Rui-san! Studying is her speciality."

"You really can do anything."

"Anything, is going too far."

As they chatted, the linear reduced its speed as it arrived at the destination. Upon exiting through the ticket gate the wave of uniforms divided into three.

The south was general studies department, east was sports department, and the three of them headed west. The third years' building was the closest to the station, second years' was in the middle, and inevitably, the freshmen had the longest distance to walk.

It was like a baptism that awaits first years upon entering.

"This way, hurrey hurrey."

"Why are you excited..."

"Let's go, Brother."

He looked at his little sister that was pulling him, and made a few steps. He wondered if she was excited with the first day of school as well——and so, suddenly students around them started to make noise.

"Mm?"

"What is it?"

The siblings looked around, all of the students were looking in the same direction.

There, was a girl with characteristically long black hair on whom their gazes were focused.

"Good morning, everyone."

The figure and features of the girl replying to their greetings one by one with a modest and faint smile was one that reminded you of a yamato nadeshiko. Even her way of walking suggested she was brought up very well.

"Who is that?"

"Cyber department's third year, Kiritou Haya-senpai. She's the one who serves as student council president for this term."

"I see, student council president huh. But even so, a 『Kiritou』 ..."

"Ahahaha, right? She's the only daughter of Kiritou group's head."

In short, she's a genuine ojou-sama. However, what concerned Taiga was neither the fact that she was the 『Student council president』 nor 『Kiritou』, it was her appearance.

"...similar, heck, is that the same person...?"

He was reminded of the previous day. The woman who was complaining to a hologram in an empty classroom.

But the personality and image she gave off was completely different. Although the appearance was beyond the level of identical twins, and more like two peas in a pod. But, since the image was far too different, Taiga wasn't confident about it. As he observed her while tilting his neck, Fuyuki who stood next to him grabbed his ear strongly and pulled.

"Brother, don't ogle cute girls whenever you see them."

"Y-you're wrong, wa—, that's not how it is so don't pull!"

"I recommend not to chase after that person—, because she's always busy with a lot of things."

"Rui, don't just say whatever you want!"

Their classroom was on the first floor of the first grade building, and located in the corner. After opening the door, there were desks and chairs for twenty-five people, a mixed group of girls and boys in uniforms met up inside.

"Good morning, everyone—!!"

Rui greeted everyone in high spirits, almost everyone returned the greeting, their gazes shifted to the siblings right after that.

Of course, the duo would stand out. Coming to school a week after enrolling, in addition to that, one of them was a girl with twin-tails.

"...Little Sister is not a freak show."

Fuyuki hid behind Taiga's back. Rui seeing her best friend like that clenched her fist tightly.

"Ah〜 everyone! I'll introduce them to you, the classmates who are going to learn together with us from today onwards!"

Rui pushed the two of them in front, and raised her voice. Her chestnut fluffy hair bounced as she drew the attention of their classmates.

"This cool boy over here is Tenryo Taiga, and this insanely cute girl is Tenryo Fuyuki. They're twins that have beautiful sky-blue eyes as their characteristic. Because of some circumstances they ended up coming to school a week late. Please do get along well!"

"...ah〜 we were just introduced, but I'm Tenryo Taiga. This is my little sister, Fuyuki."

"Greetings."

Her manners never change, no matter what, even when she was pushed in front (to be exact Fuyuki already hid behind him).

Taiga started a conversation.

"We don't really know our left from right since we just moved here, but my little sister and I would like to get along with you all."

"...yes."

After the self-introductions were over, the classroom filled with applause that started with Rui. For a while already, the gazes gathered at Fuyuki who was hiding behind her brother's back (it was mainly boys), seeing such a beautiful girl people moved closer little by little.

Seeing his little sister Fuyuki being very reluctant to speak, Taiga sighed with relief. Although he was anxious to come to such a special school, seeing that, he was relieved.

A lunch break after four periods finished in the morning.

The siblings went up the stairs, heading to the roof of the first year's building. Rui went ahead and waited on them with a thin blanket spread out. In their hands was a number of bread products bought in the store.

"Welcome back〜. the preparations are done."

"I didn't expect the store would be this crowded. This little sister was really tired out there."

"Even though I was the one to buy it."

It was close to the second year's building, in other words, the store and the dining room was located between first year and third year buildings. The crowded state of the stores wasn't odd, there were around seven hundred and fifty students in total from all three cyber department grades, it would be crowded even if only half of them used it.

While bathing in April's warm sunlight, the three of them ate their lunches as they sat on the blanket.

Taiga ate his food heartily, and Rui ate her well balanced boxed lunch (self-made) and spoke.

"Oh, right. I didn't hear from you, so I wondered, what are you two's specialized courses?"

"...specialization?"

"Courses?"

Swallowing loudly the last portion, and drinking tea from a pet bottle. Fuyuki finished eating her BLT sandwich and started listening.

"Didn't you know there are cyber-related specialized lectures?"

"Of course I know that. It was the very reason I entered this department."

Fuyuki seemed like she knew about it beforehand.

"Yup. First years need to attend these courses, and I hear that selection ends today."

"Eh, is that so?"

Taiga was surprised hearing that bit of information.

"Last week was a trial period, they guided everyone and allowed them to experience a lesson. Rui-san has already decided. What are you two going to do I wonder—"

Specialized courses are held three times a week, they were split between Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In other words, the siblings are to attend specialized courses after the break ends.

"Little Sister knew about it roughly, but the subject application hasn't been delivered yet."

"Are you going for the same course as Rui-san? It seems like it's worth taking."

"Since there's no time to choose, that's how it'll be."

"Then, what are you going to do, Taiga?"

"...going for the same one is impossible. I definitely won't be able to keep up."

Taiga chose cyber department because of his little sister, the one more appropriate for him would be the sports department. Applying without having basic knowledge was quite dubious.

He expanded the terminal in a hurry, entering the Kiritou Academy's structure, skimmed through the scattered windows and looked at the student assistance syllabus, but——

"I don't get it at all. What's the difference?"

"Is that alright, brother? Shall Little Sister choose for you?"

"No, I have to decide on my path by myself. In the end, it's my responsibility."

Part 3

He spent the rest of lunch break thinking about it, and in the end he decided right before the deadline.

After finishing his lunch he parted with the two girls and headed towards the building where specialized lectures were given.

Unlike normal lessons, specialized course lectures involved using various equipment, and there was lot of it. That's why, a total of eleven buildings were assigned for specialized courses to use.

"...of all places, it had to be here."

The place Taiga arrived at by relying on the map, was the same one in which that Kiritou Haya person was screaming at the day before. It was exactly the same classroom. It was soundproofed as well, it was the same one without a doubt.

The afternoon lessons were supposed to start soon. The main school buildings were quite noisy, but this place was eerily quiet. He checked if it was really the place specialized course was held at, but once again, it matched.

Even though he hesitated, there was no choice. He gathered determination and opened the door.

"Oh?"

There was one female student inside. She sat on an unusual classic couch and closed her terminal's window. She made a slightly surprised smile.

There was no doubt this time, it was the yamato nadeshiko he saw in the morning.

...now that he got that far it was impossible to pass it off as a coincidence. He thought that, but he still continued.

"Umm... student council president Kiritou-senpai, was it?"

"Yes. I'm serving as student council president in this term, my name is Kiritou Haya. What's your name?"

Kiritou Haya had a modest smile on her face, one that was impossible for the girl he saw yesterday.

No matter what, she didn't look like the girl who screamed at the hologram yesterday.

"Umm, is there anything on my face...?"

"Ah, no. I'm cyber department's first year, Tenryo Taiga."

"Tenry— ehem, are you the freshman who was absent for a week without notice?"

Her appearance changed for a split second.

"Uh... did it cause a problem for the student council after all?"

She was bothered by the fact that her appearance changed for a moment, but Taiga was the one who was more worried about it. He didn't care about himself, but he wanted to avoid any bad rumours about Fuyuki who was the grade's top student.

"Really, I would lie if I said it wasn't a problem at all, but the circumstances were such that you were sick, teachers were also convinced."

Of course, the illness was a flat out lie.

"By the way, did Tenryo-kun come here for Takiha Yori-sensei's lecture 《 Configuration of virtual personality 》 ?"

"Yes. It's this classroom, isn't it?"

He chose a lecture that was on the very end of the syllabus, looking as if it was hidden. Although he chose more by intuition than anything else, he didn't think it would be this room, and that the student council president would be there.

"Yeah. It is without a doubt this classroom... but in fact, this lecture is no longer there."

"Ha?"

No longer there... even though it was listed in the syllabus?

"Takiha Yori-sensei who was appointed this year was supposed to be responsible for this lecture, but due to various circumstances it was impossible. The fact that it didn't disappear from the syllabus is a system mistake."

"Then, why are you here, Chairman?"

"I was waiting here because there are students like Tenryo-kun who would come here by mistake. In fact, there were a lot of people who came here throughout last week."

"Hee—, so that's how it is... eh?"

That's when he thought of something and began feeling uncomfortable.

It's about time the countdown for classes to start begins. No students will come even if she waits like that until the last minute, at this rate she won't get to class on time either.

There were other suspicious things about this as well.

First of all, she doesn't need to wait. A notification on school's page is enough. Also the reaction she had when Taiga identified himself——

So that's how it is after all, it can't be but... really?

The yesterday's ranting, and this pristine yamato nadeshiko definitely don't match. But, it still bothered him.

For this, a straightforward approach would be the best, and so he asks her a question head-on.

"Umm, Senpai? In fact, I came to this classroom yesterday around noon. Although I've seen Senpai at that time——"

"Didn't you mistake me for someone else?"

She denied it completely. Although it might be like she said, he felt it had a feel of 'Don't step into it any further'.

"No but, weren't you shouting something about the vice principal?"

"You've got the wrong person. You saw wrongly. There's no use, so go back——please go back right now."

Feeling vulnerable in such situation, the student council president repeated those words as she broke in cold sweat. However, her tone was no longer one of a yamato nadeshiko. Although it felt as if he was accusing her of something——

〈"I'm back. Master... oh that's rare, got a visitor? Though it's the person who showed his mug here yesterday."〉

Haya's terminal suddenly lit up. With a timing as if she did it on purpose, a fairy girl appeared in the mid-air... and everyone froze.

"Uwoah?! The hologram from yesterday?!"

While Taiga was surprised by the girl's sudden appearance, Haya cracked a crystal clear, good looking smile.

".....eh, Iora? Yesterday, what?"

⟨"Yesterday at 3:45 o'clock this person looked at Master when she was about to bawl. He's been there for three minutes."⟩

"...seriously?"

⟨"Yah, it's true."⟩

creak* *creak ...like a machine, the girl cautiously faced towards him.

"....."

"....."

"...u-mm, the lecture for 《Configuration of virtual personality》, wasn't it?"

"No no. It couldn't be, since that's impossible."

Where does she intend to start over from.



Haya faced away from him and held her head for a moment. It took her a minute, when she faced him once again she had an expression indicating she gave up, and a forced smile.

"That's how it is——, it's just a façade, an especially thick one! Got any complaints?!"

Suddenly she had a desperate coming out.

"I don't really mind it... but is the Student Council President fine with that?"

"Ah shaddup! In the first place I was in trouble because you guys were absent without notice for a week! If you are sick then bring in a medical certificate! Also Iora! I told you not to appear in front of others!"

After being exposed she changed too much.

Because Taiga saw her like that before, he wasn't that surprised, but when he thought it was the same person who had an appearance of a lady-like yamato nadeshiko in the morning, he got scared somehow.

〈"Since I was already seen, I decided not to give a shit."〉

"It's not up to your discretion to decide that! If I knew it would be like this I would have cut the terminal's power off!"

〈"Wasn't it not Master the one who instructed me to project from the terminal?"〉

"Sharrup! If you reported to me that you were seen in the first place, such a thing wouldn't——!!"

Ignoring Taiga, the Student Council President faced the hologram and completely dropped her façade/

The hologram girl spoke indifferently while hardly changing her expression, he felt a little uncomfortable seeing that.

The clothes are weird, and she somehow doesn't feel like a human... what's this?

That's when an electronic sound of the school's bell started ringing. It seemed like afternoon classes have started.

"...hey, so what now?"

The specialized courses were essential. If he doesn't decide on a course it would be determined early that he has to repeat a grade. It was inevitable that he had to select a specialized course in a hurry, but it was better than repeating a grade. He launched the terminal in a hurry looking for a different course.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm looking for another specialized course instead. I can't afford to stay here any longer——okay, I'll be there in a minute if I run at full power."

〈"It's better to stop that now."〉

Just as he was about to run after checking the location, he was stopped by strange words and looked up from the window that displayed the syllabus and met the fairy girl's gaze.

"...U—mm, why is that no good?"

〈"Together with yer application for that specialized course, analysis of yer academic ability based on entrance exam results is considered."〉

"My academic ability... that information, where did you——"

A window floated in front of her answering his question. It was detailed confidential information from the school's database on 『Tenryo Taiga』, it was projected there as if it was something everyone had access to it.

"Ah, hey, lora! What are you doing! It's the confidential information I use when I'm in a pinch!"

"Wait a sec! Is this your doing, façade woman!?"

〈"I recommend this specialized course instead. It's very basic and easy to understand."〉

With a flat emotionless voice and no expression, like a noh mask. The doll-like girl ignored Haya's protests and approached him while gripping a window in her hand.

"...it's surprising. To think this girl would get involved with others on her own... yeah, it's a good opportunity, if I use this guy..."

While giving off a somewhat unpleasant feel, Haya started grumbling to herself, and it seemed like she got a little interested in Taiga. His knowledge about cyber related things was no better than that of an elementary schooler, and he somewhat treated a hologram and the window as a material that had existing substance.

AI... a presence incorporating virtual personality in an electronic form, was it.

AI——an auxiliary program that acts like support for humans and does various chores for them in the cyber world. It's very popular among working people, a cyber world's existence projected from the terminal——he was reminded of the lecture he heard in the class today.

Not a human...

But a virtual 『Personality』, should have been unable to talk back——

However, this girl, even though it wasn't much, it felt like she had emotions. Although it's so little, it could be classified as a margin of error by a human.

In any case, her suggestion was worth considering. As he tried to check out the window immediately, it suddenly disappeared before he could touch it with a finger. So that was it. It was just a human error to assume she had emotions.

"That's unnecessary, Tenryo-kun."

He heard Haya's voice. Even though he knew her true nature, she made a graceful smile trying to deceive him as she proclaimed that, and deployed another window in front of Taiga.

"《Configuration of virtual personality》 course permit? Wasn't it supposed to be gone——"

"That was a lie."

Being told that, he was at a loss for words. Haya quickly ran up to Taiga, grabbed his hand and made it contact with her terminal's window, handing over the permit. **pikon**. A procedure transferring brain wave information started together with that sound.

"Yes, the registration's complete——"

"Wai—, what are you doing!?"

Even though he tried to move his hand away in a hurry, a word 『Complete』 was already displayed on the window. And as he tried to correct it immediately after, it said 『It's been five minutes since classes started』, and didn't accept the correction.

"Fufu... just as planned."

〈"Master—, what the hell ya doin'?"〉

"Rejoice, Iora. I have found a perfect person to help with the experiments."

"Wait, wait! What do you mean by 'just as planned' and 'experiment'!"

The dispute started to go in a direction he didn't understand, but he couldn't pretend not to hear it.

"Shaddup. Just be quiet and get along with this girl. Specifically, chat with her."

"A fragmented explanation like that isn't enough!"

"You can hear the full story from Iora. I'm tired so I'm going to sleep."

Haya decided to ignore Taiga's words, and with a great momentum, she curled up like a cat on the couch and closed her eyes. Peeking out from the flipped skirt was her thigh, it gave off a really voluptuous feeling.

"...do you usually go to sleep in front of a guy you just met?"

〈"That's because Master works every night to improve Iora."〉

Taiga was amazed by her selfish behaviour, he looked at the girl who floated beside him and their eyes met.

〈"Shall I tell ya 'the full story'?"〉

"...please do."

He bowed his head obediently. There also was an option of not listening to it, but he agreed and listened to 'the full story' over the next ten minutes, and then Taiga summarized the complex contents in his head.

"...in other words, you are the new model of AI that façade has developed, 『Code Name: Iolite』 nicknamed Iora, and unlike conventional AI's you can learn emotions."

〈"That's roughly correct. Master said that to learn emotions, I've to engage in conversations with people."〉

"And I was the one chosen as your conversation partner?"

〈"It looks like dat's what Master intended."〉

He thought it would be more dangerous when she said it was an experiment, but it was surprisingly decent. 《Configuration of virtual personality》 was already written firmly on his timetable, and it didn't allow him to change it.

"No matter what I do, I can't quit this specialization... no choice, let's go along with it."

Even though it felt like it was just what Kiritou Haya intended.

"But, an AI learning feelings... I don't really get it, but... drones developing feelings? What is that façade trying to do by developing such a thing?"

"To be precise, Master is one of the developers. The other one has disappeared, it was Master's best friend, Asumi Aoko——."

Iora's words were suddenly interrupted.

As he glanced at her suspiciously why didn't she say anything else, he noticed her staring in empty space and her pupils disappeared.

"...Iora?"

A dark emptiness of abyss could be seen in her darkened eyes. Faint light within her eyes looked like a number of circuits.

Because he had a bad feeling, he reached out to touch her. But since it was a hologram his hand just slipped through the presence that had no substance in it.

But that action caused some noise in the projection and it focused once again.

⟨"...apologies. An unexpected error appeared in the operation area, I've dealt with it."⟩

"Error? Are you all right?"

⟨"The internal scan result indicated that there is no problem. There's no need to worry."⟩

He thought about waking Haya up, but if she said it's all right, then it was all right.

"Is that so. ...but what about this lecture? Is there no teacher in charge of it?"

⟨"No, in the first place that assumption is wrong. 《Configuration of virtual personality》 is a specialized course Master prepared for herself."⟩

Iora opened a window with Kiritou Haya's name, and changed it to roman alphabet. The sequence of characters gradually changed as she traced it with her finger.

In other words, from KIRITO HAYA to TAKIHA YORI.

".....it's beyond the level of 'abusing power'."

What the hell was she playing at by making a fictional lecture, is what he wanted to say but didn't. He moved his line of sight and stared at the AI:

Iolite. Her clothes looked very fantasy-like, thin and fluttery, and she tilted her head cutely.

〈"Do ya want to talk?"〉

"Well... I have nothing else to do."

While sighing, Taiga sat on the couch preparing for a conversation.

For about an hour and a half Taiga enjoyed his chat with Iora. During that time, the yamato nadeshiko continued to sleep on the couch.

Part 4

After he rejoined Fuyuki "How were your lectures?", even though he was asked that, he didn't answer and evaded the subject. In fact he just talked with Iora the entire time.

And after they returned home, the two of them dived in the Elysion for the second time.

"Now then, let's go at full force!"

"From now on it's the real thing. Little sister is excited for it as well!"

Taiga stood on a hill sandwiched between his remodelled-kimono wearing little sister, and Rui who was wearing a lab coat.

The empty sky of 《Aries》 structure was fiery red. The view they have seen with their eyes was also dyed crimson.

"...so, from today onwards we're going to fight strong guys?"

"Yes. The target Little Sister chose for suppression is this guy."

What appeared in a window looked like a scarlet flaming ball about two meters in diameter, its name was written overhead.

"《Kathartírío》? I'm sure it meant 'purgatory' in greek, right?"

"Ahh... yeah. That's its name."

"You really know a lot Taiga. But isn't it a pretty minor name?"

"There was a guy in Renjou who knew a lot.... so, if we defeat this guy we'll get a reward, right?"

"Yes. The amount was previously set too low, but recently the management increased the bounty. That's why we're going to aim for it now."

"Are we going to walk?"

"No way, that would take a week. We're going to jump, are you prepared?"

"Eh, wait, what——"

"System code, move!"

Just like his first dive the other day, he was caught by a surprise attack that twisted his body in the space. He felt like a cat that was put in a washing machine. Together with his human thoughts, his vision began to dim.

When his brain stopped shaking as if he was in a roller-coaster, the three of them were already in a different location.

It was a barren land with traces of green in just a few places. As they walked, the temperature they felt gradually increased, he reviewed the data Fuyuki presented to him as they did so.

"It looks like it's a virus whose entire body is made out of flame. But its strength is split into seven."

"...yeah, that's why it's named 《Kathartírío》."

The seven burning sins, the place for purifying those sins. The purgatory.

"What's this, 『Raises virtual temperature and interferes with environment』? Amazing— it's really hot. It feels like it's over 40°C."

"It feels like staying in bath at all times."

"Wait, is there even such a thing as temperature in this world?"

"There is. It's one of the elements to enjoy, but."

If it goes up to the level of feeling pain, the sense is shut off. For the same reason, the pain sensation was turned off as well. Otherwise it wouldn't feel like it was a game.

Also, stamina of the virtual body was displayed in percentage. The accumulated value can be subjected to interference of bugs and viruses, and the virtual body collapses when it reaches 100%.

Because the electronic body is made with special technology by suppliers, it takes time and money to reconstruct it. That was another risk to consider in addition to connection fee, it's another benefit professional artisans from cyber-related companies get from developing games.

The three of them walked weakly until they finally arrived.

"...so it's that."

"...yup, that's it."

"It's amazingly red..."

All of them took a deep breath at the same time.

""It's hot!!!""

It was already past the level of ground burnt by summer heat. They shouted angrily towards the scarlet flame sitting in the centre like a king.

The crimson ball had no nose, no eyes, and no mouth. A red skull icon indicating it was a Boss Monster floated above its head.

"Let's beat this guy within three minutes."

"If we continue staying like this we'll collapse." [2]

They didn't sweat because of the temperature. But it was unpleasant.

Sensing as their skin baked up, their thinking was blurred because of the warmth and the visibility——everything was swaying because of the heat radiating from the ground.

Then, Taiga noticed a change in the scarlet ball of fire.

Shrunk ball of flame started to expand, increasing its volume a few times. Swirling inside amplified as the flame searched for a solid form to use. After mutating for several seconds, it turned into a scarlet lion.

"Lion, is it. The symbol of the first sin — 《Pride》."

Its mane burned fiercely like the sun, it had a strong and flexible physique.

Kathartírío's first form, 《Lion》.

Taiga made a single step forward towards the growling flame lion while unsheathing his sword. He stood in front while clothed in a contrasting black and white outfit.

"It's a good opportunity, Little Sister will be the vanguard this time."

"Rui-san will do it too, otherwise her body will dull!"

Taiga admired his Japanese clothing-clad little sister's arrogant smile, and the girl clad in a white coat that twirled around while laughing happily. He hesitated for a bit before, but now made a smile full of confidence.

"Who will start first?"

"Let's start with Little Sister. Rucchan, you're up next."

"Okay—!"

Then, the two of them held out their weapons.

snap——Fuyuki presented a folding fan with bright autumn leaves printed on it. It made a good harmony together with the black kimono that had red peonies printed on it, her figure was like that of a dancer.

And what Rui has presented was——

"...pebbles?

"Non non, this is creative stone."

Kimono-clad Fuyuki being armed with a fan made some sense, even though it wasn't a weapon at all. However, for this (fake) scientist's weapon to be stones... it should be at least something like drug ampoules.

"Let's go, Rucchan!"



"Let's go,
Rucchan."

Fuyuki Tenryo
天陵 冬姫



"Aye, aye~"

Rui Saionji
西園寺 涙



Taiga Tenryo
天陵 大河



"RAAaah!"

Kathartirio
First form
《Pride》

"Aye, aye—"

When Fuyuki raised the fan to as high as her chest, balls of light appeared. There were two of them, they looked like blue crystals. They sparkled like a prism——and she smashed the two of them with a sloppy fan folding technique!

They shattered like glass, and the shining particles melted into the atmosphere. Then, as the sky turned cloudy above the flame lion, a snake made out of water appeared from the clouds and attacked the lion.

That was Fuyuki's attack-configured program———Elemental Sphere.

It was a small program constructed in a spheric shape, the program was activated by its destruction. Because it's small it can hold one property each——If red, then a flame. If yellow, then lightning——and it wasn't just manifestation, it was a program rich in diversity of uses.

The water snake entangled the lion's body binding it. But together with the lion's roar, it flared up and stretched, burning out without a trace.

Purgatory had a strong skin. However his body was suddenly pierced by several sword blades. The swords that hit it like arrows, they were launched from the stones Rui had between her fingers.

Rui's attack-configured program———Creative Stone.

It was a unique program of Rui who's an excellent creator. It's a program that makes a small stone change into weapons like spears or swords after being thrown, it had a lot of applications like crushing target under a huge weight for example.

"——Eh, what's that. Isn't that unfair?"

That's the impression Taiga had.

It was an irresistible ranged attack. Although Taiga who was an onlooker described it as 『Unfair』, their weapons were in entirely different league.

"What is it, Brother. Is there anything about Little Sister that you're dissatisfied with?"

"Nono, your weapons, their appearance and performance have nothing to do with each other!"

"Please don't group normal weapons and Rui-san's special programs together. Ah, by the way, Taiga's one has a special setting as well you know?"

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Your weapon has elemental attributes just like your little sister's. The more familiar you get with it, the easier it will be for you to use them."

So it can release something like that as well——, crossed Taiga's mind.

The attacks of the girls seemed to work, and Kathartírio howled as electromagnetic waves passed through its body. The body of the lion started to shake and returned——to being a flame ball.

Purgatory violently started bubbling as it changed. The figure it changed to, was a snake with ten to twenty heads and clad in blue flames.

"The Second sin 《Envy》 huh. Isn't its model Yamata no Orochi..."

"With this much heads it turned into something disgusting."

"In any case, let's end this quickly. It's too hot."

The second out of seven, there was still a lot ahead.

After that was a three-headed wolf, a pegasus, a nine tailed fox. The three of them defeated the mutated forms of 《Purgatory》 one after another. Next, was a body with six eyes.

gyuwan ——The black flames radiated towards the crimson sky, and bullets of black flames hit the earth.

He used all of his strength to draw the nodachi and stood in front of the girls protecting them by cutting the black flames.

The burning flames dominated the sky. An enormous fly clad in black flames, that was the incarnation of the sixth sin 《Gluttony》 .

They were attacked by loud noises from the four blade-wings flapping loudly several times already. The sweeping flames increased gradually, Taiga crouched and lowered his sword.

"Damn, come down here already, so I can cut you down!"

"Come on, calm down, it'll be down soon."

"Together, Rucchan!"

Using her remaining strength Rui created multiple creative stones around them, and Fuyuki produced wind by destroying a white sphere and sent the stones into the sky, above the lord of flies who was hovering in the sky.

Composite creation——the creative stones connected with each other while in circular motion and doubled their mass, and fell from above as a huge mass of steel.

The fly crashed from the sky screaming in agony. Dealing a final blow Fuyuki destroyed three yellow balls summoning lightning from the sky.

Thor's Hammer.

Fuyuki and Rui boasted of having the strongest anti-air powers.

"...another flashy technique."

"It's a bold move that can't be used continuously. But it worked pretty well."

Rui responded to him.

The 《Gluttony》 burned with a pale flash of light while it was stitched to the ground, and started shaking like a heat haze.

And after black, silver appeared.

The silver flame dissolved the steel mass in an instant, and its appearance hardened.

Eight feet supporting its huge body, both of its arms were steel blades made to reap lives, a three pronged spear at the end of the tail.

The seventh sin 《Lust》 ——a scorpion.

"It's finally the last one. I was getting tired of it."

"Brother, please don't let your guard down. The final form is the strongest."

It's alright——just as Taiga was about to say that, he lost the chance to do so.

The silver scorpion that seemed to have dull movements, suddenly jumped as the speed of a bullet.

"Uwoahh?!"

As the heavy strike of the sickle swung down on him, he instantly poised with the nodachi to block it. A tremendous impact of the blow hit the arms supporting the nodachi and Taiga made a pained expression.

He slashed the scorpion in response, however, it was repelled by the silver armour together with a high-pitched metallic sound.

Hard——

Surprised by a completely different sensation from before, Taiga was blown away after receiving the strike.

"That's why I told you not to let your guard down!"

Taiga rolled for a moment on the ground and managed to rebuild a defensive posture after getting up. Fuyuki destroyed two white balls with a fan, and even though a few wind blades attacked the enemy, they dissolved after reaching the enemy's robust armour.

So this will not work either, Fuyuki clicked her tongue as she thought. Silver flames were rising from the entire body of 《Lust》 up to the tip of its three-pronged tail.

As fire bullets increased in size and density rapidly, Fuyuki and Rui moved together.

"Rui-san will create an opening, so try to break it down!"

"I leave it to you!"

Fuyuki created three elemental spheres that had brown colour, and Rui threw a total of eight swords.

The swords were unfortunately deflected by the armour, Fuyuki's fan waited for that moment and struck. The ground under the scorpion swelled and a fist of rock suddenly disrupted its balance.

Immediately responding, bullets of silver flames that were shot enlarged.

The lump of fire missed the two people and landed far behind them, a fierce flame that erupted was enough to cause a scorching wind, and the flame spread widely.

"Kuh... it has amazing power doesn't it. If we were hit directly we would be done for."

Rui said that while grimacing as the hot air hit her entire body.

While the sixth form, 《Gluttony》 used fire bullets, the power of this form was on an entirely different level. With such insanely destructive power, the electronic body would collapse from a single blow.

This is a virus Boss Monster. An enemy powerful enough to have the bounty on its head manually increased.

"If it's like that, to win we have to make our move first!"

Rui rushed forward to stop it before the next bullet is shot.

She lightly avoided the sickle that was swung down, leaped on the scorpion and hit the back of 《Lust》 with creative stones. The blades that were thrown in the gaps between the armour pierced brilliantly, and exploded all at once on Rui's signal.

Kathartírio's cries resounded. And the armour changed mutating like liquid, sharp thorns appeared on its back covering the gaps.

"Wai- isn't that a foul play?!"

The moment its only weakness was found, it was covered. The next blades that followed were repelled. At the same time it moved its body like a snake and 《Lust》's sickle attacked Rui who had nowhere to escape in the mid-air.

"RAAaah!"

The sickle and Taiga's sword clashed, and after a few seconds of struggling 《Lust》's big frame was blown away. The scorpion retreated in the middle of a dust cloud, its howls reached the heaven, from the entirety of the steel body silver flames emerged.

"Are you two alright?"

"Rui-san is alright. You were the one who intercepted the strike, are you okay Taiga?"

"It's not like it was a direct hit. Heck, this guy, isn't he completely different than the forms up until now?"

"From now on it's the real thing. The opponent is a virus with a price on his head, it won't go down that easily."

A speed that didn't suit such a big frame, intense flame bullets shot from its tail, a robust armour repelling attacks... it was clearly very strong. Sins from the first up to the sixth seemed like they were just a sideshow compared to it.

"If possible we should avoid close combat but... if we get hit by those fire bullets, we'll be done for."

"Yes. Also, it looks like we can't take too long."

Fuyuki responded to him and opened a window. The status of the virtual body was displayed on it, the value corresponding to the body's interference increased at a fast pace.

"Apparently this hot air isn't just unpleasant.. It also continuously interferes with virtual bodies damaging them."

Fuyuki's total value was already over 30% even though she wasn't hit even once. If they keep receiving damage, at this rate they may collapse in few minutes.

"First we need to do something about that armour. How about we destroy it with a simultaneous attack?"

"Let's go then... here I come!"

Just after Fuyuki and Rui decided on the next course of action, 《Lust》 charged at them with tremendous speed, all three avoided it spreading out in different directions. Fuyuki and Rui sandwiched it from both sides, and Taiga jumped, diving on it from above.

"Haaaaaaaaa!!"

Violent sparks appeared as steel met steel. Not allowing it to recover, Taiga continuously dealt powerful blows with his blade. They were evenly matched, and his fast slashes were intercepted by a flaming blade.

Taiga had a number of weapons, like superior skills, a strong physique allowing him to deal heavy blows, sixth sense obtained during his military service——and the greatest weapon of them all was, this speed.

Godspeed reflexes going beyond the limits of the human race, dynamic vision surpassing common sense allowing him to see rifle bullets in slow motion, overwhelming agility allowing him to reach top speed instantly.

But even if he used them to the very limit, he couldn't endure forever and was blown away by a strike that came from both sides at once.

Just as planned.

"Thanks for buying us time! Let's go, Rucchan!"

"It's the special move!"

The two of them gathered strength and launched their attacks at 《Lust》 who immediately tried to pursue Taiga.

Red, blue, and white, Fuyuki struck the three orbs, and Rui threw two spinning massive Creative Stones into the sky above. The stones divided into tens of smaller fragments, and then further into hundreds of fragments, and each one of them changed into a sharp lance.

"Parallel Creation 《Spear Rain》 !"

A rain of spears poured down one by one, and repeatedly pierced the armour one after another.

But even though many holes appeared in it, the broken parts continued to recover. That's where Fuyuki followed up.

"Triple Spell 《Steam Flare》 !"

A shining white ball emerged on 《Lust》 's back and burst expanding all at once. An attack bearing a name of steam explosion hit the silver armour causing intense vibrations and pushed the spears further in.

"——Boom it goes♪."

Rui who stopped moving snapped her fingers, and a huge amount of spears immediately exploded.

The armour that was crumbling because of multiple shockwaves, turned to pieces together with that explosion.

Kathartírío's 《Lust》 form's screams filled the air loud enough to rupture their eardrums.

The fight wasn't over with just the destruction of its armour, as if having a grudge on them, all the flames converged on its tail.

But——it was too slow.

Taiga rebuilt his posture and started running towards the scorpion with his sword pointed to the ground. His body reproduced the movements he did tens of thousands times before without thinking and performed,

"Renjou sword technique, fourth form——"

That moment, an anomaly appeared on the sword's blade. It began buzzing with electricity and flashing intensely. A purple flash dyed the space around Taiga.

He raised his wrists as a blade was swung down on him and cut, disconnecting the scorpion's sickle at the base, after that he continued slashing diagonally. Furthermore he twisted his body without killing the momentum and swung once again drawing a cross shape!

"——— 《Raijyuji》!!"



A skill that allows the user to dodge the enemy attacks while aiming for their weak points with godspeed strikes.

Twin strike clad in purple lightning easily cut through the silver body that has lost its armour, and disassembled it into four pieces.

With a scream reverberating in the air, the Boss Monster, virus Kathartírio disappeared.

Silence dominated the wilderness.

The flames lost their source and disappeared, the uncomfortable temperature went down like it was all a lie. Taiga looked for a moment at the afterglow of the disappearing purple lightning, and sheathed his sword. Together with its cool sound, the time that stopped started to move once again.

"We won... it's our first victory, Brother!"

"Ah, yeah. We won."

The excited Fuyuki jumped around spontaneously. And he looked at the sunset dyed with the battle's afterglow.

"...a win huh."

"It's an undisputed complete and perfect victory."

Rui smiling from ear to ear came up to him and grasped his hand and shook it strongly.

At that time her large breasts shook as well, moving up and down. His eyes were drawn to them——

"Seems like brother doesn't learn."

Stab.

"Gyauh——!! Eyes...my eyessssssssss!!

He rolled on the ground after getting stabbed and blinded.

After he saw Rui's breasts at extremely close range he couldn't help but admire them. It wasn't reality so he didn't sense a crisis. In fact, there wasn't any pain.

"Ahh—I thought I've gone blind... so, what was that in the end? Like electricity or something."

"That was Taiga's program, its name is 《Heavenly Sword》."

"It's not just electricity, it can release things like wind, flames and water as well. In Brother's case, it seems like with familiar movements it should be easy to get fixed types. ——Well then! Let's pick up our reward. Please log out brother."

"Nn? Is this the end for today? Isn't there still time?"

"Nyaah, since it's our memorable first suppression we should celebrate, there's a lot of things to prepare."

"Oh, I see... is the location Paradise?"

"Yup. Come over around eight o'clock."

The memorable first battle of the trio ended with a victory.

Part 5

A few hours after coming back to the real world, the siblings aimed for 《Paradise》.

"A celebration party means there will be food and stuff right?"

"That's exactly what preparations meant. Fortunately the war funds are ample, also the shopping is easy since she's the only daughter of the store owners."

"...by the way, how much was the reward?"

"Five thousand yen for each of us."

"Eh, seriously? We're getting that much for just that?"

"It was reckless to face that enemy with just three of us in the first place, and also because of the virtual body reproduction costs the reward is higher. By the way, the reward is even bigger if it's a new species."

With that pricing it was worthy being called bounty hunting. If done efficiently, living just by bounty hunting wasn't impossible.

"It was not all used on the party, I passed a lot of money to Rucchan for our future meals in 《Paradise》. Although I'm asking you for approval in retrospective, but you don't mind right?"

"Not at all. I don't need any money now."

It was exactly eight o'clock p.m., the siblings left their home and walked through the city that wasn't asleep yet. Although it was not a downtown it wasn't too bright, there was no brightness and huge flow of people that was characteristic to big cities.

"Welcome, oh, it's you guys. It isn't time for kids to walk around now."

When they entered the café 《Paradise》, it completely turned into a bar.

In a modern atmosphere customers were tilting their glasses, and standing by the counter was Saionji Jyugo dressed like a barman. The last of the café atmosphere that was there during the day completely disappeared.

"We know. Didn't you hear from Rui, Master?"

"Now that you say it, she left earlier. Is there something?"

"Just a little party."

Fuyuki followed Taiga and sat on the counter seat naturally. Unlike his little sister, Taiga was used to it and didn't feel any discomfort.

"So, where is Rui? She doesn't seem to be here."

He could see there was no maid in the bar with a single glance.

"Oh, it seems like she went out to the town... that said, I thought she was kinda slow not coming back yet, I can't leave the store and look for her."

"I'll go then. Master, do you have a place Fuyuki can wait at?"

"Our home is above. Customers don't enter it."

"Well then, go and wait there."

Even though Master was there, something still could happen. He didn't want to leave his sister with people who drank alcohol. Fuyuki guessed her brother was worried, and with a happy face went up instructed by Jyugo. Taiga went out to the city at night to check on Rui.

Since shopping wasn't intended for the store but a party. Rui finished the work early and went out twenty minutes ago, she left the store while still wearing maid clothes.

"A maid walking in the city at night, eh?"

It was beyond the level of standing out.

The nearby supermarket is quite far away by foot. If she gets involved in some trouble——

"Hey, don't ignore us〜 play with us a little."

"I told you NO! You're annoying!"

"I found you."

On the opposite side of the road, the voice that reached him from between the noise made by cars wasn't the same as usual.

What was seen in the light, was a neatly dressed maid with chestnut brown hair.

She had both of her hands on a shopping bag, and was surrounded by frivolous men who didn't allow her to move.

The men surrounding her seemed to be pretty drunk, their faces were tinged with red. One man angrily stretched his hands towards the girl. The moment a hand forcibly tried to grab Rui——

"Hey you. What are you doing to my friend."

Taiga walked through the road cars were driving to and from, and twisted the man's hand.

"Ta-Taiga... ?"

"H-hey Rui. You were late so I came to pick you up."

"It hurts! Y-you fucking brat! What are you doing!"

Because he twisted his joint perfectly, it was quite painful when the man tried to move. While the man was acting violently and screaming in pain, at that moment Taiga wasn't merciful enough to care about it.

The men around went crazy because a boy suddenly appeared and had their comrade in a hold. One of them who tried to hit him, crashed with the man whose joint was being twisted.

He ignored the two of them who collapsed like a wall, and said to Rui.

"Why didn't you change from maid clothing. You're a little too careless."

"B-because if I didn't hurry the preparations for the party wouldn't..."

"...now that you say it, sorry for leaving it all to you. But Rui, you're a bit too unaware of your own appearance."

If a girl that cute wore a maid outfit, she would definitely be called out to by men.

She was scared, her shoulders were trembling slightly. Taiga noticed that and pulled her soft body closer, giving her a hug.

"Ta-Taigaa?!"

"It's alright."

"...aa..."

"It's alright now."

He repeated those words gently. As if cutting the thread of tension, Rui entrusted her body to him with eyes closed.

Relieved for the time being, he noticed the men from before act frantic.

"——Ah, sorry. I completely forgot about you guys."

"This shitty brat... you better prepare yourself!"

"I'm prepared. But the ones who aren't seem to be you guys."

Simply stating that, Taiga snapped.

He didn't know why. But something snapped in him the moment several men raised their hands at Rui.

Thanks to the self-control cultivated by training, he didn't beat them up.

Just——

"If you say anything else... I'll silence you physically."

He said that to them without any hesitation, and with a spark in his eyes.

"Guh..."

Even an amateur without any knowledge could feel his thirst for blood.

A feeling they don't encounter in their every day life cooled them down instantly, it was so effective that it made them stop breathing for a moment.

"...tch, if you have a guy then say so in the first place. What a waste of time."

Scared of the invisible pressure, the men left with a quick pace. Even though they said that as they left, it was practically a getaway.

"Come on, let's go."

"Y-yes..."

"Fuyuki is waiting, let's go back quickly."

He took the full bag from her hand, and headed towards the intersection in order to pass the crosswalk properly this time. Rui stayed in the back, daydreaming.

"Yup, let's go back."

She ran up to him with small steps, and hugged his arm.

"Why did you come back linking arms you asshole Brother...!!!"

"It hurts... it hurts real bad, seriously I'm not joking!"

"Well then, let's start celebrating!"

Rui in her unchanging maid clothing declared and opened a bottle with amber liquid, at the same time as violent punishment was carried out next to her.

**pann*, *pshuu*!*

"Wapuu."

"You... isn't that champagne!"

"I took one when I was in the store♪."

After that, the party started completely.

On the second floor of Saionji's, in one of the rooms, simple sweets made by Rui and snacks that were spread out disappeared in their stomachs one after another.

After about twenty minutes have passed——

"Funyaa〜 are you done Brotzerrr. Your hand stoppedd〜"

"Ar'ya not gong to eat my cookin〜〜?"

"Why are you two drunk!?"

Two cute girls were completely finished.

Let's say it to avoid misunderstanding 『There was sake mixed in the drinks!』 there was no such thing. What the three of them drank was simple juice.

So why has something like that happened.

"Getting drunk with just a smell, just how weak are you..."

They were stimulated with just the alcohol in the air. The two of them got drunk with just the smell released at the time champagne was first opened. Also, why Rui, who should have been used to it got drunk too.

"Mua〜 Brozzer don just look at Rucchan."

His little sister sandwiched his cheeks between her palms, and changed his head's angle by force. She sat on his lap with her body all reddened and eyes glazed over.

"A punishmnt smooch fer cheatng Brotzer."

"Stop stop! A maiden can't do such a thing, it's illegal!"

"Dat's right〜 Fuyukii〜. Siblings shoun't kiss〜"

This time it was Rui who came up from behind and clung to him. A big and extremely soft thing pressed his back changing shape.

"Rui, you too, let go!"

"Why〜?"

He couldn't even answer because of embarrassment.

Seeing Taiga distracted by his back, Fuyuki puffed her cheeks. And――

"Ngghh〜! Amu."

Chomp, something warm has enveloped his ear.

"Ouwah! Wai- what are you doing, Imouto-sama!"

His earlobe was nibbled on with sweet sounds, a tongue extended into it with watery sounds. And it stopped with a loud wet noise leaving a silvery thread behind, which severed soon after.

"Not bad Fuyukii, den Rui-san too——"

"Noo! Onii is Fuyu's! From head to toess all of it is Fuyu's!"

Somehow, she regressed into a toddler.

"Onii..."

And for the brother those words were agonizing. In various ways, it was really bad for a siscon.

The 『First suppression commemoration party』 carried on with such a feel.

After a noisy while, the Saionji house was in middle of clean-up.

"Uhh— that was too much champagne."

"Geez, don't take products out of the store. I'll take it from your pocket money."

"No way?!"

The cleaning of the store done by parent and child wasn't too difficult because the siblings weren't messy eaters. The only exception was the champagne that was ejected when the siblings were playing around.

"Hey, Dad."

"Nn?"

While wiping with a rag, Saionji Rui asked her father who was picking up garbage.

"You know, am I actually a simple woman?"

There was a light in her heart, a warm light.

"Just because I saw someone act a little cool, because I was saved. For such a reason, I got interested in someone."

She didn't expect an answer.

She just wanted to ask someone.

She wanted someone to push her back.

And then, her father——

"Who knows. For the time being, why don't you hit and see?"

Just as she unconsciously wished for, she got a straight answer.

"...hit?"

"Whether your feelings are real or not, if you're anxious why don't you try actively attacking. Maybe you'll be able to figure something out?"

Holding a garbage bag, Jyugo left the room. Rui looked at her father's back through the window. The crystal clear blue sky was now covered by darkness.

"...yeah, that's true. Waiting is something I can't agree with."

Her heartbeat started to beat faster and her body temperature increased when she thought about looking at that figure the same way as her best friend did. To check what is the feeling that was sprouting, she gently placed a hand on her chest.

Chapter 3 - Rampage, and a Chance Meeting

Part 1

"...okay, done!"

It was a very warm spring morning.

The morning weather was good enough to blow away the feeling of heat they experienced in Elysion yesterday.

On a second floor of café 《Paradise》, a store set up in the corner of the New City, in Saionji's kitchen.

A girl with a glamorous body wearing a pink apron, struck a guts pose after finishing the masterpiece she was working on from six o'clock in the morning.

Her father has already entered the first floor and started preparations, and her mother was working in her office room taking care of food orders.

Usually Rui was still sleeping at six o'clock in the morning, but today she somehow woke up early while rubbing her eyes sleepily.

"It took me an hour. I'm not sure if there's enough of it, but... it's pretty good, even if I do say so myself."

Rui folded the apron and started cleaning up.

It was currently seven o'clock in the morning, the siblings would come soon. She had to prepare everything before then.

"Fufufu."

His face when he first met her, she remembered the surprised and admiring expression he had when he saw her dressed as a maid.

The crystal clear sky-blue eyes her best friend had, and she was so envious of. When she thought about his eyes that were the same as his little sister's, her heart started beating faster.

He wasn't used to the opposite sex, and his reactions were cute every time. And yet, he seemed wild and harsh when he gripped his sword, as if he was a sharp blade himself.

Every day has gotten more fun ever since he came, the time she spent with him was brilliant.

Well then, it was time to start another enjoyable day of hers——

"Uuu... my head hurts..."

"Hey hey, stop staggering. Here, hold onto me."

"I'm all wobbly... Brother, piggyback please."

"That'll be the last resort."

The siblings walked under the blue sky to meet up with their best friend for breakfast.

Because of Fuyuki's drunkenness and going to sleep early, Taiga could get a proper refreshing sleep until it dawned.

However, now the little sister was completely unlike the refreshing morning sky, she held her aching head and had a faintly blue face, and walked while leaning on her brother.

In other words, she had a hangover. Even though she didn't drink anything.

"To think Little Sister was so weak when it comes to alcohol... Onii, piggyback."[1]

"Did you regress into an infant again?"

"Haa... Brother, right, it's Brother. I need to be careful."

"I don't really mind if it's 『Onii』. Didn't you call me that way in the past?"

"I don't want to. It's childish."

He wondered if she wanted to appear older. She did look really young, so he could understand that feeling.

While he supported her small body (by the way, they looked like a student couple making out from a third person's perspective) they walked together for about five minutes, and arrived at Paradise later than usual.

"Welcome Taiga... eh what? Why is Fuyuki...?"

"Ah just a little something. Sorry, but if you could get her something light for breakfast it would be a great help."

Greeted by a maid that didn't suit the store's atmosphere, he put his little sister down on the seat.

His little sister laid down on the counter table, and looked up at Rui from below. She saw a chest that couldn't even be compared with her own.

"Everyone with big breasts should just die."

Because she felt bad, her language turned bad as well.

She was at her limit, and her face hit the counter. Taiga and Rui looked at each other.

"Ahaha... then, I'll get Fuyuki something light."

"Sorry for that."

Various things happened after that, and when they finished their meal they headed to school.

For some reason Fuyuki was revived after eating the breakfast, and the gloomy atmosphere was instantly dispelled.

Her long black hair that was divided into twin-tails danced in the Spring's sunshine.

"...how beautiful〜"

From Rui's point of view that figure looked mysterious and fantasy-like, beautiful enough for her to admire.

The twin-tails was a hairstyle that emphasized childishness, but in Fuyuki's case it worked in reverse, giving her a more adult charm (also, it fascinated Taiga).

In other words, it was 『Envy』, something she didn't realize before.

Also, Taiga's silence affirmed it, which worried her even more.

"What's that?"

There were three bags, and in them was rectangular luggage wrapped in cloth, it was quite heavy.

"It's a secret〜. You'll know in about five hours."

The three of them took a linear later than usual, heading to school.

In Kiritou Academy, the cyber department aimed at the same or a higher level than general course when it came to basic subjects. That's why, since there was the additional burden of specialized courses, the progression rate of basic subjects was inevitably faster.

So, if the level was higher, the lesson structure was more inclined to application rather than memorization.

In other words——

"Sugar〜 give me sugar〜"

"It's too early to collapse, Brother."

The boy who survived the entrance examination thanks to memorization and overnight cramming, was already getting left behind.

It was the lunch break after four classes, and there weren't many students in the class. Taiga's face fell on the desk.

It seemed like smoke came out from his head, and it wasn't just a metaphor. That's because he never was good with studying.

His head was already a mess during the third lecture, during the fourth, the teacher's words entered his ears from one side, and left through the other.

Then, a call came in to Taiga's terminal. The caller, Rui, already went ahead to the rooftop while holding bags with wrapped luggage.

〈"Ah, Taiga? Preparations are done, you can come over."〉

"Finally. So, did you prepare food or something?"

〈"Look for yourself, you'll enjoy it."〉

He gestured to Fuyuki summoning her, and they went up the stairs aiming for the roof.

"Welcome to 《Paradise》 on a business trip〜!"

The only people on the rooftop were the three of them, a blanket was spread in the best possible location where the sunlight was strongest, and boxes with a total of five layers were spread out on it. In the layer on top of four others were rice balls.

"Woah, Rucchan, did you make all of this?"

"It's all handmade♪."

"It really is amazing... but this, no matter how you slice it, isn't this too much?"

"That's because people who do sports eat a lot don't they〜. I thought Taiga would be like that as well〜."

"I know of something called weight management. I refrain from indulging in gluttony."

There was no way to imitate the strongest weapon of his, the speed. However, it was true that the exercises consumed calories like crazy.

"Uuu... th-then, will you... not eat it...?"

"...no, I can eat if it's this much."

After glancing at Rui, Taiga corrected himself in a hurry.

That expression was a foul play. He wouldn't be a man if he didn't eat it after seeing that look on her face.

Seeing a smile bloom like a flower on Rui's face, Taiga decided he made the right choice.

"Well then, Itadakimasu."[2]

"...itadakimasu."

"Enjoy yourselves."

He extended the chopsticks towards the opened boxes in front of him.

No matter which one, the taste was amazing, and Taiga's hand didn't stop until the five-layered box was empty.

They enjoyed a cup of tea after a meal, and then went back to the classroom. Also, they refused Rui's proposal to make them boxed lunch every day with 『"We can't bother you that much"』, and settled on 『Occasionally having some』 after a few complications.

After school they headed together towards the station, and came back to central station by taking a linear. And just when Taiga thought they will go back home and enter Elysion——

"Brother, let's go on a date."

"...ha?"

Hearing that, he stopped thinking for a moment.

"Date you mean...? Doing things that couples do?"

"YES indeed! The couples going out together do do various things, that kind of date."

"But you're siblings, aren't you?"

"Even if we're siblings let's go out together. In fact, it's even more special since we're siblings."

"But it's misleading if you say it's a date. 'Why don't we tour the New City—' and invite him like that."

"You mean, you will guide us around, Rui?"

"Of course!"

Certainly, the only places they have been to ever since they moved in, was just Paradise, their own home, station and school. They could get a map from their terminal, but they never had time to look around.

"You mean, we're not going to enter Elysion today?"

"We don't have to log in every day, also there's the accumulated damage from yesterday's battle. We'll wait a day until it recovers."

In that case, there was no reason to refuse the invitation. With that said, the three of them walked around the New City that was crowded with people.

New City is mainly divided into an eastern and western part around the central linear station. Café 《Paradise》 and the Tenryo siblings apartment were in the eastern part, residential areas, stores and entertainment mainly scattered around the city. Generally, the students mainly used the city's eastern part.

"There's a lot of large shopping malls... looks like there's a lot of stores in here."

"That's because Kiritou Academy is a mammoth school with three thousand students in it. There's no shortage of customers to attract."

The commercial street was a short walk away from the station, it was really crowded and very active.

There were a lot of students wearing Kiritou Academy's uniforms, they were either window shopping or eating out in the free time they had after school.

"That shop over there is expensive, but they sell cute accessories. That restaurant has delicious parfaits, but other than that it's mediocre."

They walked around the avenue while listening to Rui's guidance. Even while walking around the commercial street, the trio easily attracted people's gazes.

Two cute girls were one reason, plus one of them (of course it was Fuyuki) clung to a boy's arm, and was in the spotlight.

In other words, they were gazes of jealous boys.

"...being stared like that makes it hard to walk."

"Ignore what they're saying. It's a situation that should be openly enjoyed."

"...Rui-san should also be aggressive like that... but it looks like it's too embarrassing after all..."



"What are you muttering over there, Rucchan?"

The trio continued to walk while acting cheerful and noisy.

In the corner of shopping mall, there was a shop with female clothing——

"How is it, Brother. Does it suit me?"

"...ain't there too little exposure? Leaving shoulders exposed is normal ~"

"This IS pretty normal. Speaking of which, you're wearing quite plain clothes as compared to yesterday."

"No, it's Rui who has a perfect style so that looks good on her, unlike this flat-chested Fuyu——."

"Little Sister's screw uppercut!!!"

"Gouah!"

"...what are you doing in the changing room?"

He accompanied two completely different types of cute girls as they were shopping,

"Brother, won't you buy me that ring to commemorate our first date?"

"Umm, Imouto-sama? Isn't that a diamond or something?"

"...well then I'll settle for that."

"That's also pretty expensi——no, it's nothing."

He held his head with one hand as he made an unplanned expense in the accessory shop.

"Oh, this is delicious."

"Red potato taste huh, please have a bite."

"Then, here have this in exchange."

"...having crêpes after school, this really feels like youth."

"That's because we are young maidens. Here, I'll give mine to brother as well."

"Ah yeah, sankyu."

"Mouth to mouth."

"Cherish yourself a little more, young maiden!"

The trio had a good time sitting in the park with crêpes they purchased.

After they finished touring the eastern side, on the opposite side of the station was the western side occupied by company buildings.

That's where they headed. As expected, there were barely any students over there.

"No matter where I look it's people in suits."

"Though, there are leisure facilities here, like a zoo or amusement park."

"I see, so that you don't have to leave the city to see one on holidays."

As they walked down the road, the street had skyscrapers lined up and what entered their line of sight were just signs describing the company names. As they looked around looking for something standing out, their eyes were naturally drawn to the building around twice as big than others.

"So that's the Kiritou Group headquarters..."

"Big, isn't it. It seems to represent the power of New City."

"Want to enter and look around? The first and second floors are open for visitors and have cyber-related products displayed."

"Brother, let's go!"

"...your eye colour changed ~"

He went inside of the Kiritou Group building pulled by Fuyuki whose eyes were shining.

They passed through the huge building's dazzling entrance hall, and headed to the second floor in an elevator.

After the front door opened, there was a hallway in which a number of devices was exhibited.

"Brother, Brother look at this! It's amazing!"

"Ah, yeah, so it is."

While pulled slightly by his max tension little sister, he looked at the exhibit.

As several of devices like Arclight and terminals that even Taiga knew were lined up, between them 『How is this used?』 were things that made him think that.

At some point, excited shouts could be heard from a square away. When they looked towards that direction interested, they saw a dozen people gathered in the square's corner.

〈"Everybody, why don't we play a game to commemorate your visit?"〉

A hologram depicting a woman in a suit was projected on the side.

Judging from her inorganic, expressionless voice, it was an AI widely used as a receptionist. Hologram projectors seemed to be installed in various places.

The game itself was a simple shooting game that pursued realism by using a Hologram

"Let's try it out!"

Rui enthusiastically placed her hand on a handgun model displayed. A hologram displaying a two legged drone popped up and approached her.

"There! There—!"

Rui shot them one after another as they were displayed. Fuyuki continued to observe products not interested in the game. And Taiga who was being a little bit left behind, observed Rui play from a distance.

...I thought so yesterday already, but Rui has pretty good reflexes. If she trained she could be as good as I am.

Rui continuously shot the appearing drones breaking them.

Her dynamic vision and reflexes were good, and she hadn't missed a single time yet.

She had better physical ability than most girls her age, good at studying, good at cooking and had a perfect figure. Truly a high spec girl.

He moved his line of sight away, there was an AI that didn't move an inch.

Its fake smile clearly looked like it was 『Artificial』 .

"...it's a same AI but it feels fairly different from Iora."

〈"Did'ya call me?"〉

"Ouoah?!!"

He heard a response right next to his ear.

And after he looked down at his shoulder, he saw Iora's figure ten times smaller than she was before, jumping up and down on it.

"Oh, you surprised me... so, why are you here Iora? Also, you've gotten really small..."

〈"Master's working here, I am currently in navigation mode."〉

She added some more supplemental information about a lot of things. It seems like she can change the scale of her body. That felt really useful.

"Ah, now that you say it she's a daughter of Kiritou's. So, why on my shoulder?"

〈"Let's continue from yesterday."〉

The look on her face didn't seem to answer his question, but some kind of curiosity glimpsed on it. Her heart seemed to be unsteady.

"Continue from yesterday, that means———"

〈"The story about crushing mafia two years ago."〉

"Ah, that. Unfortunately, I'm currently in private time mode. We'll continue that tomorrow in class."

〈"Mu—....."〉 [3]

He was a bit surprised by her regretful expression.

It couldn't be said that she has a lot of expressions, but it seemed like there's more emotions in her than yesterday. A difference could be easily seen by comparing her with the AI over there.

"To think you changed just by chatting. Just like I've been told, that's amazing learning ability."

〈"Did I really change that much?"〉

"There's a great change as compared to yesterday. You're not aware of it?"

〈"...dunno. But... there's something that's not Iora, something hateful... what the hell is feeling?"〉

Asking about the dark feelings she had in her heart.

She might not keep up with the rapid development of emotions. He wanted to say some appropriate words, but he couldn't think of any.

That's when, a loud noise rang out from towards the stage. It seemed like Rui apparently cleared the game, she had a big smile and was showing a V signalizing her victory.

〈"Then, about time Iora excuses herself."〉

"Eh? Yeah——"

The moment he removed his gaze from Rui and looked at her, Iora was already gone. He decided to talk about it with Haya tomorrow, and looked at Rui again.

"...no matter where you go, you really stand out."

It might be just her looks, but it seemed like there was an aura that attracted people's gazes around her.

Maybe it was just her natural disposition. Her charm, and a foundation of her overwhelming presence.

No matter when, she was always dazzling.

I wonder, if I'm like a moth attracted to her light.

He knew. That was, a feeling that came from a silly inferiority complex.

"...really, how ridiculous."

He murmured very quietly, so that no one could hear him.

He wondered if that light could clear up his darkness, wondered if he could forget about his past.

———Even though he decided not to forgive himself, ever. He wondered if he was asking for salvation.

Rui received praises and applause from people surrounding her, the sun she was the centre of, seemed like a distant scenery that didn't reach Taiga.

They walked around until sunset, and returned early to have a dinner at 《Paradise》.

After healing themselves in the bath, the siblings were sitting in the living room.

"Brother, how about a cold tea?"

"Oh, sankyu."

Together with the sound of his little sister's slippers, the ring on her finger shined, she got it as a commemoration of the date (she made him buy it), a ring with an azure stone.

"Umm, isn't that the finger a wedding ring goes on...?"

"There is a deep meaning to it."

"It's no good over there, is it!!"

Recently, this little sister did things that her brother couldn't understand.

Fuyuki stroked the ring cherishing it, it was chosen on the spot by her, because it had an azure stone embedded in it. When he looked at her eyes, and compared it to the stone colour, he noticed there was a difference between them.

Their eyes were ones that direct descendants of the Tenryo line were born with.

In fact, their mother had the same eyes. Their eyes were often called 『Sky eyes』 or 『Crystal eyes』, their eyes symbolized the power of the Tenryo household that had an even longer history than Renjou's. That's what they were always told by their mother.

Maybe because he thought of their mother like that. He had a flashback that felt like an old injury about what happened eight years earlier.

———That day, they were deprived of everything.

The whole family was walking through a cross-walk.

A large truck stuck at the intersection ignored the signal. Taiga who had superhuman reflexes and dynamic vision noticed immediately and was able to react, but his parents and little sister couldn't.

As young as he was, he made the worst choice.

No, even if he said it himself, he was the one who was the worst.

With his own physical ability, and the position he stood in, his parents that couldn't be saved in time——feeling like he wanted to puke because of his calm thoughts in that situation, Tenryo Taiga discarded his parents.

".....ngh."

"Brother, your teeth will break if you put any more force in it."

Before he knew it, Fuyuki appeared in front of him and hugged his head gently. He felt the warmth of the hand that stroked his head repeatedly, he felt something from it.

"Can it be, did you remember what happened eight years ago?"

"....."

"So that's how it is after all. You made a scary face so I realized immediately you know?"

"...that's my sin. I won't ever forget it, not even for a moment."

"Brother didn't do anything wrong."

"I know. If I tried to help father and mother back then, both of us would be dead now. I know that!"

He understood that deep inside his head.

Back then it was the best course of action. Even as he is now, back then he didn't go through any special training, but even now he probably couldn't save them.

Nevertheless, his heart didn't acknowledge it and continued crying out, burdening him with that sin. As if it were begging for forgiveness, as if it was seeking condemnation.

Tenryo Taiga clung to the chest of the one he saved.

"But I, I allowed the two of them to die!! Even though I knew they would die, even though I understood that, I didn't hesitate even for a second!!"

To rescue just his little sister, he sacrificed both of them.

That's why he sought strength. In order to protect everyone next time. In order to save everyone.

So that no matter what happens, he can protect everyone.

And more than anything——to protect the last remaining member of his family.

While being hugged tightly, Taiga breathed heavily releasing it all.

Seeing her brother like that, Little Sister thought,

———It's like a curse.

The talent given to him from the heaven, the talent that led him to the future, continued to torment him.

And her brother was in agonizing pain. But she loved him very, very much.

"...it's alright, Onii. The past, the present and the future, your little sister forgives it all. That's why———"

She placed her forehead on his, and stared at him with the same eyes.

"Onii should continue walking on his path without ever stopping."

Just hoping for that.

She wanted for her beloved person to follow his righteous path, and receive his reward in the end.

Part 2

〈"Now then, hurry up and continue your story."〉

"...I beg you, don't wait for me right by the door, it's scary."

He entered the deserted innermost school building, and after opening the classroom door he stepped inside slipping through Iora. Haya who lied on the couch raised just one hand up.

"Heya."

"...as ladylike as ever aren't you, Haya."

That light greeting decreased his mental strength because it was done by a girl that had the appearance of a yamato nadeshiko. The person in question had a mean, evil smile on her face at the moment.

"In just two days, she really got attached to you. That Iora, she's been looking forward to the continuation of your story ever since yesterday."

I'm a little jealous~, she didn't say it, but that was what her relieved face seemed to say. It was an expression like that of a mother's who was happy her child found a playmate.

"How do I say it, you're like a guardian."

"...well, Iora is something like a daughter or a little sister to me. Calling me her guardian is not wrong."

〈"Taiga, hurry up, I want to listen to the rest of the story."〉

He sat on the couch and Iora continued to float in front of him. Seeing that, he passed off the worries he had the other day as imaginary fears.

After taking a deep breath he looked around the room.

The room wasn't wide, but it was filled to the brim with equipment that apparently didn't belong to school.

A rare thing in modern times where the e-books are mainstream, was a bookshelf with about a hundred books on it. The room of course had air conditioning, a small refrigerator and a dish rack could be seen in the back, there were also wardrobes with various things in them.

It felt like, a person could even live in this place.

"You really do as you please."

"I am in a position that allows me to do as I please."

She does whatever she wants without a shred of fear. She made a fictional lecture, made an unused part of the school her private room, seeing it go that far he could only sigh.

"Oh also, I'm not going to be unreasonable and just force you to work, don't misunderstand. This is work so you're going to get your reward."

"Reward?"

"Yup. Kiritou is still developing its influence. So they can't afford to pamper relatives. You get to have one wish fulfilled every time you show results—
—that's the agreement I work under."

Kiritou was an electronics-related company that emerged in the recent decade.

Until then, there were three large companies, Karasuba, Namisagi, and Tokiminu. They bit into the monopolized cyber market thoroughly, seeking profit, but they still weren't in a situation where they can let their guard down.

"...the president's daughter has it unexpectedly hard, huh."

"That's how it is—. I accumulate a lot of stress. That's why instead of me, I count on you to spend your time with Iora."

"Then, if it's just that—hey, wha?!!"

⟨"Taiga, I want to listen to rest of the story."⟩

Startled by Iora's head popping out from his stomach, Taiga tumbled down from the sofa.

After school, as usual Haya headed towards the company headquarters, leaving the specialized course building.

She had to finish all of the student council's business and attend lessons before the lunch break. To avoid the possibility of teachers complaining about the work she was responsible for.

"...okay."

After changing clothes from her uniform to work suit, she slapped her cheeks.

In this place she didn't wear 『The mask of student council president that's loved by everyone』. What was important in here——was to produce proper results.

After releasing the lock by authenticating with her brainwaves, she entered her private laboratory on the upper floor of the Kiritou company's building.

Even though it was called a laboratory, there was only an arclight there. The real laboratory was inside of Kiritou's structure.

A company-made arclight was laid out around the centre of the room, various devices were surrounding it. She closed her eyes after entering the capsule-like core part.

"——Dive start."

Her consciousness was interrupted and instantly put to sleep, she woke up a moment later.

The login procedure was natural and quiet, there was no dizziness like in medium-sized machines. Haya immediately began her work.

"Iora, are you awake?"

⟨"That question is unnecessary. A virtual personality does not need rest."
⟩

Iora appeared in the centre of the room in response to her call.

"It's just a little joke. Don't take it seriously."

⟨"...is that so. I still can't understand jokes."⟩

When she looked at Iora's pupils as she said that, she saw frustration in them.

Even though I developed her by myself, this really is amazing progress ~

That could without a doubt, be called an emotion.

Ten months of development, no, three months to be exact. But the growth didn't show up until a few days before, her sensitivity evolved dramatically since then.

...really, it's so fast it's scary.

For some reason, Haya couldn't bring herself to rejoice over her evolution.

After continuing to improve Iora. The fruits of her work have finally appeared.

However, if this evolution causes an 『Unexpected』 situation———.

"Iora, a schedule change. Lie down there, and give me a full scan."

⟨"Understood."⟩

She was still anxious, even though she performed a full scan just recently.

A bed appeared through object manipulation, Iora closed her eyes and lied down on it.

Haya placed a hand on her and shifted the virtual personality into dormant state. There was no effect on her personality even if she changed the internal information in there.

"It'd be good if there were no bad viruses inside of it."

She started a scan immediately.

A vast amount of information continued to scroll down like a muddy stream, and Haya continued to analyse and discuss it in her head.

This is not required so it can be forgotten, I wonder if this has to be modified.
——Nn?

Scrolling stopped.

There was a program code written in it, that she didn't recognize. It wasn't there during the scan three days earlier.

"...found it, this is the cause. It's a bit unexpected."

A clear and simple beyond imagination, a program code woven with a single purpose.

Although she had a déjà vu as she examined it, she immediately tried to touch and remove it with her hands——

⟨"——— Activating."⟩

From the supposedly unconscious body's mouth, a machine-like voice leaked. The change was dramatic.

A crimson light poured out of Iora's body like blood and spread, it started wriggling and wrapping her body from head to toe.

"Wha- what's this?!"

It was an ugly, sickening sight. It's as if a real slime was devouring it's prey——

Indeed, it was predation. It was definitely predatory, it was eroding her.

"Guhh—— 《Emergency shutdown》 !"

Haya ordered it to stop by using remote control. But, it didn't stop.

On the contrary, the crimson mucus began to expand several times. It swallowed the bed, and stopped in one spot modelling a creepy sphere, which burst at once and contracted.

The red mucus splattered around, it looked like a gruesome scene of a tragedy happened.

"...Io...ra...?"

In the centre, in a pool of blood, there was a movement that ignored the laws of physics, It wasn't 『Iolite』 anymore.

Her appearance itself didn't change much, only her hair was dyed blood red.

But on the surface, there wasn't a single fragment of Iora left.

The expression, her eyes, even the atmosphere around her was colourless and transparent. Unfocused eyes that had neither warmth nor coldness in them, they were just eerie.

〈"——— Recognition start."〉

The crimson girl murmured.

〈"Information acquisition complete. Location confirmed, multiple virtual bodies reaction confirmed, commands confirmed."〉

"What are you... saying...? Hey... what's going on, answer me!!"

It wasn't speech.



She was just listing out words.

That's how devoid of emotions it was.

Showing interest in Haya's cry, what used to be Iora continued.

⟨"Situational awareness complete. Program ‹Jail› experimental operation setup, complete. ———Experiment start."⟩

She turned her head around, and looked in front.

"———?!!?!"

Goose bumps appeared on Haya's entire body, instinct more than thinking drove the finger and activated the room's defence system.

⟨"Barrier confirmed. Elimination by cutting recommended."⟩

Crimson light converged in her hand creating a huge sickle. It was even longer than the entirety of her dress, the girl grasped it in her hand and———everything exploded with a flash.

"Kyaaa!!"

The electronic barrier that was spread around couldn't withstand the shockwave, and was brutally cut apart. Haya was blown away and slammed into the wall as the aftermath swept into the room.

Can't be... to think the barrier would be broken so easily...

Sometimes unexpected situations happen causing accidents during experiments in laboratory. That's why, a high level electronic barrier was set to prevent the worst in case there was an emergency.

And that, was blown away to pieces with a single blow.

It was quite a strong impact, but Kiritou structure blocked the pain. She looked around the room for her, she noticed ends of scarlet hair in the destroyed doorway.

"———IORA!!"

Haya thought of what to do as she got up, she chased Iora's back and contacted the management division at the same time.

If she loses sight of Iora now, she'll never see her again——that's the feeling she had.

"Emergency call! AI is running away from the lab area, hurry up and seal the structure———"

"Uowaaaahhh?!"

Her voice was interrupted by a scream.

She repeated the terms 『Virtual bodies reaction』 and 『Start the experiment』 again and again in her head.

The view that appeared in front of her after she anxiously ran towards the screams source was, many of her colleagues lying on the ground, and a crimson girl grabbing a researcher's neck with one hand.

What... just what is going on?!

Her thinking couldn't keep up with the incomprehensible situation. A scene where dozens of people were lying down unconscious in virtual reality was impossible.

In the first place, people get automatically logged out from their virtual bodies by management's security measures after they lose consciousness.

Lying unconscious like that, was impossible.

"H-help me! Everyone was beaten up by her———"

The researcher that was gripped by his neck asked Haya for help, but the girl holding him poised her sickle,

"Stop, please stop Iora! 《Emergency shutdown》 I beg you, stop——!"

⟨"——— 《Jail》 activate."⟩

Her desperate cry was in vain, as the sickle of madness pierced through researcher.

"Ah....gahh...uah..."

The abnormality began immediately.

The researcher trembled as his voice leaked out, and his eyes lost their light.

The moment the light in his eyes was lost, the sickle pierced into his belly seeped out, and was pulled out again.

An abnormal spectacle.

However——she knew. She knew what this sight was, she knew very well.

"It can't be... why, why did that program?!"

The researcher became a dumb doll deprived of its contents and thrown away. Likely detecting an accident happening, combat AI's transferred over one after another to protect the structure.

⟨"Several hostile forces confirmed. Assessment of the situation———experiment interruption. Escape recommended."⟩

"W-wait, Iora!"

She shouted at Iora who realized she was at disadvantage and started running away. Immediately after, she noticed. That direction——was the worst.

"The transfer section... she's going to run away to another structure?!"

The blockade process wasn't completed yet.

There were around twenty passages from the transfer section, it was quite time-consuming to close them all. While it was requested, it will probably not make it in time.

Haya immediately seized control of the combat AI's invading the management division, and moved while leading the troops. Alarm signalling unauthorized access resounded, but she couldn't afford to care about such a thing. If it's left to Kiritou, Iora will be disposed off without a doubt.

I won't let that happen... I will stop her!

With determination filling her heart, Kiritou Haya ran through the structure.

Part 3

At the same time, there were three figures including in the 《Aries》 structure. Taiga was one of them.

"Yahaha, that took a while——"

"There were quite a lot of troublesome small fries. They stood in front of Little Sister's social standing and didn't give us a single penny, they should know their limits."

The three of them walked through vast plains between mopped up small flocks of viruses, some of them were pierced by huge swords here and there. it was a little tiring for them.

"But, well, we should be arriving soon right?"

"Yes, just a bit further."

They walked for twenty minutes from the nearest transition point, Taiga was tired of the empty plains.

But to earn a living, he could not skip out on a hunt. The three of them waited until the virtual bodies self-healing was complete, and decided to go on a suppression mission to subdue a virus for a bounty.

By the way, the current mission was like the last one, a new and yet undefeated species. Because of that, the reward was higher.

"Honestly, it might be tough with three people, but we have to do our best."

"How many people together does this usually take?"

"Nn—— It depends on the competence of individuals, but it's at least five people. But the two of you are stronger than normal because of Rui-san's special attack-configured program～"

No matter how much the bounty is, it'll be offset by the repair bill for the virtual body if it falls apart.

So as to hunt safely and efficiently, it became a basic strategy of qualification holders to increase the amount of people in a group, even if it reduces the share they get.

"So, what kind of enemy is it this time?"

"In a nutshell, it's a huge knight machine. It's name is 《Peroon》, it's a powerful, two-staged enemy that repelled the suppression corps before."

"And it was a party of people who had three A-rankers within them."

"That 『Rank』 isn't quite satisfactory. Isn't there a higher rank we can obtain by winning?"

"Yeah, let me explain it briefly. There are six ranks in total, from E to S which is top rank. Brother is at the start line, an E-rank."

"Hmmm... and what determines your rank?"

"The battles done up to this point, there's a system incorporated in the attack-configured programs determining many elements. Going to B is relatively easy, but from that rank and higher it's extremely difficult. Little sister has also remained a B rank for two years straight."

"There's only about a hundred people who have an A rank～"

"That means, Rui is one of those hundred right?"

"No, Rucchan is even higher, she's one of the ten people who have an S-rank."

"Eh, is she that amazing?"

"Ehehe, oui!"

In the first place, Rui was a senior player who played ever since Aries was founded. When it comes to ability, Fuyuki was at least an A rank even though she didn't gather enough experience to advance. The rank isn't directly related to a player's ability, it's only one of the indicators.

The rank has nothing to do with the body's ability or damage reduction, it's completely unrelated.

When the talk about that has ended, it suddenly darkened.

"Mm?"

"Did it become night already?"

"No way. Night should have ended barely three hours ago——above!!"

When they looked up to the sky warned by Fuyuki, they could see a mass of steel falling straight at them. He embraced Fuyuki instinctively and backstepped, Rui also jumped back.

A second later, the lump of steel collided with the ground.

The earth shook from the collision, a limb came out from the growing metal mass. Gigantic and completely disregarding laws of physics, steel riddled with complicated symbols, a knight of blue steel shouldering an enormous axe.

"Mu—. Taiga, what's the meaning of this, why did you only protect Fuyuki?"

"I believed Rui would be able to dodge that. So, is this guy the target?"

"Yes. It's 《Peroon》. But I didn't think he would come falling from the sky."

Without panicking, Taiga unsheathed his nodachi, Fuyuki flapped with her fan, and Rui set up creation stones in her hands.

The enemy, a mechanical knight raised its axe slowly, and was about to charge at them.

〈"——— Obstacle confirmed. Recommended elimination by cutting ——

—”>

And then it happened.

With absolutely no warning, something crimson cut Peroon, bisecting its body.

".....eh?"

The machine's body was cleanly cut from left to right and continued to crumble starting with the cut's surface, it faded away unable to maintain its integrity.

A single blow, with just a single blow the virus 《Peroon》 was suppressed and gone becoming particles of light.

"...Fuyuki. Something like that, storming in, does that happen often?"

"...no way. Seeing her prey being brought down in front of her like that, is a first for Little Sister."

In front of three people who couldn't move surprised, the extinction's afterglow gradually faded out and they saw one figure basked in the sunlight.

"...a girl?"

Defeating a virus that three people would have a hard time suppressing, with a single blow. She had a crimson hair and empty pupils, a girl who held a scythe that could easily slice apart a human.

"She looks like a Grim Reaper. But she doesn't appear to be a virus."

"There's no price on her head, guess we have to change the place."

While the two of them were wary of the intruder, Taiga recognized the figure from somewhere.

He feels as if he saw her before. And he remembered the AI that was always together with Haya.

"Iora...?"

Image and atmosphere were completely different. But, that was definitely her figure.

"An acquaintance?"

"Yeah... but she shouldn't give off such a strange feeling."

He took one step forward towards Iora who was rooted on the spot like an object. He raised one hand signaling the other two it's alright and stood in front of the crimson girl.

"Hey Iora. What's up with this appearance? A makeover?"

There was no answer. While continuously looking expressionless and empty, the girl turned around slowly. A shiver went down his spine.

He regretted the fact that he approached her thinking it was Iora even for a moment.

Overwhelmingly, hopelessly, catastrophically, it wasn't a body of an intelligent being——

⟨"—— Virtual body confirmed, resuming experiment."⟩

Together with these words, the motionless scythe moved slashing at him.

He avoided the first blow thanks to his reflexes, though an ordinary person would not be able to react to it, Taiga unsheathed his nodachi in an instant. But because he was lost in thought, his posture was bad.

Heavy...! How does this brute force come out from such a thin arm...!

He diverted it by changing the angle instantly. But he lost his posture because of the overwhelming force. The girl slammed him into the ground and grabbed him by the neck rendering him defenceless.

"Gah——"

There was no pain. But his vision was dyed white for a moment after being smashed by superhuman strength. The girl used that chance to swing her scythe down on him——

"I won't let you!"

Blades flew out from between Rui's fingers.

They exploded the moment they collided with the scythe, and the impact caused it to miss and stab on Taiga's side. At the same time, two creative stones wrapped around the girl's arm and inhibited her movement. Rui rotated her body as she changed creative stones to blades, and slammed them into the defenceless abdomen!

"Fly away!"

The blades exploded the moment they hit the girl, blowing her away. Furthermore another eight blades were thrown in pursuit and reached her.

"How dare you slam Brother into the ground... I'll smash this crimson woman until she's one millimetre thin!"

Towards the girl rolling on the ground, Fuyuki smashed three soil-coloured elemental spheres. The girl was confined in a prison of stone, and a huge rock fist was dropped on her from above.

"Taiga, are you okay?"

"Sankyu, I'm saved. It seems like she's fairly accustomed with close combat."

"Fuyuki and Rui-san will be the vanguard."

"That's enough for talking. Brother, I don't know what kind of acquaintance that is, but for the time being we should beat her up. I think the other party isn't too talkative."

"...right? She cut the completely defenceless Taiga all of a sudden."

〈"Resistance confirmed. Rendering target harmless recommended."〉

At the same time as the muffled voice can be heard——a crimson blade hit the rock fist above it, and shattered it.

Fuyuki's attack definitely hit. The damage could be seen on the reaper-like girl, but she stood up without batting an eyelash.

"I'm going to attack from the front. You two attack her when there's an opportunity!"

The nodachi and the grim reaper's scythe launched at a tremendous speed and met.

Deflecting away the sickle's strikes that came at him, he resisted them, and looked for one. Rui walked behind the girl and threw the blades in the gap he created.

"-----
-----!!!"

The grim reaper howled.

No expression other than howl was appropriate. It wasn't high enough to be a roar, the force of the screech shook their eardrums.

"Gahh——?!"

"Huua——?!"

"What... is this, ultrasonic wave?!"

Their eardrums were damaged through the ear canal. Although Taiga withstood sonic grenades before, Fuyuki knelt losing her balance. Even Taiga could barely stand up, and attacking was out of the question.

clank ...he heard a faint high-pitched metallic sound ring in his head. The instincts he has cultivated so far warned him of crisis, and allowed him to jump away.

The scythe's blow tore through the thin air and lightly touched his ear.

"Don't... look down on me!!"

Together with the roar his fighting spirit was roused, he lifted the sword and rebuilt his posture quickly. The sickle and his blade clashed, the girl retreated two, three steps and lowered her scythe.

⟨"Information updated, revising target's threat level higher———
adapting. Suppressing target."⟩

The crimson girl moved before he did.

The huge sickle was swung at Taiga from the front. Although he wondered why she hit without using any tricks, suddenly the speed increased.

"——Damn it!!"

His dynamic vision held out allowing him to barely keep up. But the blows were dealt in rapid succession,

It's gotten a bit faster...!

Taiga continued to gradually increase the speed he swung his sword at, same as the grim reaper.

The speed of their exchange seemed to rise endlessly——however, Taiga reached his limit sooner than he expected.

What's this... the body doesn't keep up with my thoughts...

In a high-speed battle, one can't show carelessness even for a moment. Although it was only for an instant, it was the first time his body ignored instructions ever since he was born.

And that happened more often every time his speed increased.

I don't get what's happening, but at this rate... before that happens, I'll decide it with a single blow!

He lowered the cutting edge and pulled the nodachi.

The nodachi was charged depending on stance, sparks and crackling resounded. First he slashed at the sickle's handle, and then two blows followed on the unprotected body.

"—— Fourth form, 《Raijyuji》!!"

A blow that could not be avoided or prevented. A deadly blow that should definitely have cut the opponent apart——was stopped with a single hand.

"Wha——?!!"

A hand wearing crimson light stopped the slash clad in purple lightning. Not even in his wildest dreams had Taiga thought it could be stopped, and that's what happened there.

Clearly, Taiga was off-guard.

Normally he wouldn't stop after hitting with one skill. He would have followed up immediately.

The fact that this was Aries and not a battle in real world, has deeply penetrated his heart, causing him to get caught off-guard. It's a game after all, in the end it has no effect on reality——and so on.

"Taiga, it's coming!"

When he heard Rui's voice, the reaper already swung it's scythe.

Taiga moved his nodachi startled as well, but he could only look at the sickle swung down with herculean strength.

However——

Rui stood in front of Taiga while holding a blade, which shattered and she was penetrated by the sickle, unable to do anything.

She probably didn't intend to be slashed. But the defence made out of blades was destroyed, and the sickle went deeper and deeper inside of Rui's body.

⟨"—— 《Jail》 activate."⟩

The crimson girl muttered after piercing her. The red sickle pulsed like blood vessels, electromagnetic waves crackled around Rui's virtual body in response to it.

"...aa....aaaa...."

Iris started to fade away from Rui's pupils little by little.

Without blood flowing out, without a scream, but something invisible to the eye was gradually shaved away.

———Her appearance overlapped with the one his parents had before they died.

"——I won't let youuu!!!"

That moment, he stopped thinking.

Led by an angry impulse, he smashed into the tip of the sickle. Rui's body slipped away from the sickle and fell down, at the same time he gripped the sword stepping forward, and hit the girl with all his strength blowing her away.

He literally sent the reaper girl flying over ten meters, and she hit the ground before bouncing a few times.

"Haa—.....Haa—....."

He lost control of himself for a moment.

He cooled himself down immediately, remembering it was Elysion

———It's alright. It didn't matter if they were cut in this world, they won't get injured anyway.

"Brother, Rucchan! Are you alright?"

Fuyuki came running while still wobbly, it seemed like she still didn't collect herself from the sonic attack.

Taiga raised his hand signaling they are safe and took a deep breath calming his mind.

"To think a sound attack would come... my ears have gotten weird."

"Also that superhuman strength. It's too surreal to handle such a scythe with one hand."

The siblings talked without panicking. Rui's virtual body didn't collapse, she will get up soon——that's what they thought.

"...Rui?"

The first one who noticed the abnormality in her was Taiga. She didn't show a sign of getting up, and she was leaning on Taiga without strength in her body.

"Rui? ...hey, Rui!"

When she didn't respond to his calls, the doubts turned into impatience. Fuyuki also squatted and noticed something strange, she shook Rui's body.

"Rucchan! What's going on? Rucchan?!"

"...Ta.....i...ga.....?"

They were relieved hearing her voice react to them.

But she was barely conscious. Her eyes were opened only slightly, and it seemed like they would close any moment.

"Fuyuki, what's going on?!"

"...I don't know why, but the auto-logout function isn't working even though she almost lost consciousness. Let's hurry to a safe place, we're going to logout manually."

"Well then, let's transfer immediately!"

"Move command will take at least ten seconds because of coordinate calculations. ...at that time, this thing won't wait obediently."

The crimson girl rose up barely feeling the damage from before. The moment Taiga raised his sword up, he noticed an abnormality in his body.

I can't feel my right arm...?!

It was the moment he hit that thing. At that time he moved by instinct, and something in him completely disconnected.

He wondered if he could fight like this, his leg movements as well——

〈"Minor damage received. Remnants of enemy force confirmed."〉

"...Fuyuki, take Rui and——"

"I won't run away. It's not someone brother can defeat with an immobile arm."

Looks like she noticed.

Casually holding a scythe, the girl approached. The two of them knew that she was the cause of the abnormal state Rui was in. If that was the case—— they can't afford to be hit a single time.

〈"——— Continuing experiment."〉

Like a ghost, the reaper accelerated slipping through the ground, the siblings raised their weapons.

"I found you——catch her!"

At that time, he heard a familiar sounding voice.

A dozen of mechanical dolls appeared with weapons in their hands and according to instructions jumped at the girl.

〈"Several hostile forces confirmed. Assessment of the situation, recommending elimination."〉

But even though one swing of the sickle bisected three bodies, the reduced number continued to attack. In the back of the unit, a girl in a suit commanded them while having a terrible expression.

"They can't match her after all. Civilians over there, hurry up and run——— away..."

When she looked back, she froze seeing the two of them.

"...Taiga?"

"Haya?!"

The two of them were surprised to meet each other in such an unexpected place.

Haya's eyes looked behind Taiga and Fuyuki, and were directed towards Rui, she noticed the red scar engraved on her body.

"That wound... it can't be, was she cut?!"

"Was she slashed...? Haya, what are you———"

At the same time Taiga questioned her, a loud sound of destruction reached them.

Dozens of AI bodies were cut apart by a roundhouse slash, faded away and became light.

"Gh... it can't be helped. I didn't want to use it if possible, Master Code 《Forced Transition》!"

As she clicked her tongue, a hexagonal crystal appeared on Haya's hand, it faded away and melted into the atmosphere. A big alarm resounded throughout the world.

《"Emergency alert, emergency alert. A serious problem has been discovered in the structure. Everyone will be forcefully transferred into another structure———"》

"What—, what did you do?!"

"It seems like that's going to seal off 《Aries》! Brother, hold Rucchan tightly!"

The moment he tightly embraced Rui as told to by Fuyuki, his vision twisted. All of the scenery mixed and became a mess.

"Ughh....."

Along with the uncomfortable sensation that made all of his five senses go crazy, his consciousness was removed from 《Aries》 structure.

When feeling came back, and his sight was restored, it wasn't 《Aries》 anymore.

"...the academy's... structure?"

The space in which the wall was glowing seemed familiar——it was the classroom Haya made private. However, it wasn't the real world, but Elysion. However.

Haya triggered another hexagonal body next to her and murmuring 《Quarantine Closure》, exhaled after finishing her job.

"Blockade complete. There's no need to worry that she escapes to another structure now. ...so, on to the next thing. Taiga, why were you in a place like that?"

"That should be my line."

Even though it wasn't the real world, he laid Rui down on the couch. He placed a hand on her cheek, and it felt like she had a fever, he called out to her quietly.

"Rui, are you alright?"

"...oo...uu....?"

Her eyelids opened lightly, Taiga breathed with relief that her consciousness recovered a little.

".....who...are you?"

His consciousness froze instantly.

"H-hey..."

"Rucchan, get a hold of yourself! Look, it's Brother. Tenryo Taiga!"

"...Ta...iga...? Right...Fuyuki's...onii-san.. Rui-san's...friend....."

Rui desperately dug in her memory.

But her voice was breaking up, her eyes were unfocused, her consciousness was impaired to the point of losing it any moment. These abnormal words caused the siblings to go blank in this emergency situation.

Meanwhile, Haya who calmly observed the state Rui was in, moved.

While muttering she placed a hand on Rui's head. Then Rui's eyes slowly closed, and she disappeared into the void as her body shook. And she was transferred somewhere.

"Leave her to me. I'm not going to do anything bad to her."

Haya stated that with serious eyes she didn't show at school.

"...you better give us a proper explanation later."

"Of course. But wait a little. We need to treat her before it's too late."

Too late, treat her——he wanted to pursue it right away, but Rui's safety came first.

Fuyuki probably knew that as well, she grasped the hem of Taiga's clothes and signaled with her eyes 'Let's pull out for now'.

"...I get it."

The siblings started the logout process, and went back to the real world.

Haya contacted them an hour later.

Chapter 4 - A Vow to Uphold

Part 1

It was the time when sunset began to dye the sky in its colours.

The siblings headed in a taxi through the New City towards the western business district. After getting off in front of a white building they hurried inside.

"You came, it's here."

Wary of Fuyuki, Haya who guided them was in student council president mode. Even though Fuyuki heard her real tone of voice in 《Aries》, she was still cautious.

The only, and a very large hospital in New City, Kiritou general hospital. The private room they arrived at was in a special ward, they entered .

"Ah, yahoo—, you two are here—"



Rui had a raised upper body. It didn't feel like she was in a state where she was barely conscious an hour ago, Taiga stroked his chest in relief.

"Looks like you're alive and well. I wondered what happened when we were suddenly called to the hospital."

"Yahaha, sorry for worrying you."

"If you're alright, then that's fine."

For the time being, they were happy that Rui was safe.

When he looked around again, he noticed the hospital room was quite broad. The furniture and a pure white wall had a considerable sense of quality to them.

"It's a private VIP room. To prepare such a thing in one hour, as expected from a daughter of Kiritou."

"Fufufu, I'm acquainted with the director of this place. so I had it specially prepared."

Her tone changed to a polite one (Taiga didn't remember her cold tone anymore) as she stood a small distance away from the three of them.

Taiga wanted to learn what's happening as soon as possible, but he hesitated to ask in front of Rui.

So while Fuyuki was talking with her, he walked up to Haya and asked in a low voice.

"...is Rui really alright?"

"There's no need to worry for the time being. But the problems are going to start now."

"...got it."

Being said that it's alright only for the time being, part of his anxiety was revived.

"You said you prepared this room. But you're not acquainted with Rui are you?"

"I knew her name because she's a promising freshman, but that's all. ...so, right. She's staying at your house today, Taiga. Her parents sent you their best regards and leave her to you."

Although Haya answered indifferently, there was a glimpse of fatigue she couldn't hide on her face, it was probably mental fatigue——. If it was Iora who had undergone a sudden change, he could only sympathize with her.

"Are you alright?"

"Don't worry about me, worry about her."

Haya clasped both her hands soundly as she said that, and drew the line of sight of Rui and Fuyuki. She instantly pasted a perfect smile on her face.

"Let's go down the main issue. The state Saionji is in now, and the girl you three met, I'll explain all of it."

"First of all, Saionji's state. It's pretty poor to be honest."

Haya sat down on the chair and looked straight at Rui. Rui probably guessed it, and somehow accepted the declaration.

"...what do you mean by 'poor'? It looks pretty normal."

"Absolutely not. Saionji-san is in a state where her foot barely works right?"

"...Rucchan, is that true?"

Fuyuki didn't expect these words and stared at her.

Taiga as well thought that it couldn't be, and grimly stared at Rui.

"Uu... Kaichou-san. I told you not to tell them..."

"Recognition of the current situation is important. Besides that, the abnormalities are not only on the surface. Saionji-san, how much memory do you have left?"

"Eh...?"

For some reason Haya said those words with confidence. And not even Rui herself anticipated them.

"...so you still haven't realized."

"Please wait, Kaichou-san. What do you mean by memory?"

Fuyuki cross-examined Rui. Taiga had an idea. Memory——that word, it was only for a moment but Rui could not recognize him back then.

"Just what I said. Saionji-san, do you remember where you were last night?"

"Of course I remember."

"I see. Then a month ago——around the time where you graduated from middle school. What about that time?"

"Umm... after graduation ceremony I was with a friend... a, eh?"

She played with her friend——that's how it should be.

But she could not remember. Her friend's face was definitely in her memory, but she didn't remember her name. People around her were missing from the memory's landscape in her memory, as if they were cloth eaten out by a moth.

"What... why?"

"...looks like you can't remember. Looks like symptoms are still light, we'll see the results of the scan and you'll leave this place tomorrow evening."

"Hey, Haya! Come on and tell me already! What's happening to Rui?!"

Taiga hearing the roundabout conversation focused on the core issue.

If there's a progressing abnormality in her body, there's a need to investigate the cause as soon as possible. And that said, why was she talking leisurely about it.

"Brother, please calm down."

"But——!!"

"Little Sister is also confused, but nothing will change even if you shout. Nothing good comes out from losing your cool."

He calmed himself down after taking a glance at Rui. She was laying straight on the bed and looking at him with a worried expression.

——Idiot. What are you doing worrying her instead.

As Taiga took a deep breath and waited, Haya projected a window from her terminal.

The projected Hologram looked like a pale sphere floating in the void.

"Now then to continue——Taiga-kun, do you know how the consciousness is maintained in Elysion?"

"Eh... yeah—what was it. The consciousness is downloaded in form of data and placed in a virtual body..."

"The outline is not wrong, but the answer isn't sufficient."

"Brother, wasn't it just taught in the class today?"

"Ughh..."

His lack of studying was exposed in an unexpected place.

"Lack of Taiga-kun's knowledge aside. Human mental structure is used as a base for generic biological information and memory. When you log in, your mental structure is transferred into the virtual body located in Elysion, after it's removed from the real body by arclight. That means, the virtual body is extremely sensitive to the mental structure and changes automatically. The body is very consistent with the mental structure, in other words, it's exactly the same as the one in physical reality."

In other words, it is a structure of soul and mind, your own body is left behind and that's inserted in an empty vessel——that's how Taiga interpreted it.

"This sphere is a graphical representation of a mental structure. Normally a mental structure is not beautifully one-coloured like this... but this is Saionji's mental structure now."

Haya summoned another window, and arranged it neatly right next to the first one.

The difference between the two of them was obvious.

"...this is, what does this mean."

"...as expected, it's not a laughing matter."

Taiga who was lacking knowledge about cyber-related things, could not understand the meaning of what the figures were showing.

But even so, he understood that the mental structure that was stained by crimson in some places as if eaten out was abnormal.

"A spiritual structure, in other words, it's a soul. It's like an engine that's required to move a human brain. If there's a problem with the mental structure, the body is affected as well. Also, so is the memory."

The part that was contaminated by red was smaller than one percent of the total. But while they were watching, although only by a little, a crimson part has eroded a normal part. Turning it blood red - 〈Crimson〉 .

It reminded them of the girl with the huge sickle.

"...the cause is that thing?"

"To put it simply, she was injected with a virus. A virus that erodes the mental structure——although it said something like 《Jail》 or whatever."

"But, I've never heard of a virus that interferes with the mental structure! No, in the first place interfering with the human soul is commonly acknowledged as being forbidden!"

"Yeah, that's right. Because interference with Mind Crack."

It's not regulated by law. Rather than that, the laws are far behind the logic of Elysion.

Although there's a story about a special police department in charge of Elysion recently, but the country couldn't interfere much because of the four companies monopoly.

That's why a minimum of morals was required for those that work in the cyber world. Out of the things ethically prohibited——Mind Hack was a prime example.

"Mental manipulation... it sounds like that thing is really dangerous."

"I've heard stories that terrorists tried to develop and practice it. But in fact, I haven't heard of a single success."

"Because it's still a black box to us, we're unable to analyse mental information."

No matter how much technology progresses, the matters of the human heart aren't something that can be easily analysed. That's why 『Immersion devices』 are only capable of doing things to a certain extent.

"It's just as Fuyuki-san and Saionji-san said, we can't 『Interfere』 with it in a true sense. But a year ago, a certain company began studying it for the purpose of converting it into a military asset, and was able to artificially create a similar phenomenon. ...the centre of it became a certain girl."

Haya took a big breath and sighed, she started to talk again after fixing her posture.

"——a researcher affiliated with Kiritou Group, Asumi Aoko. My best friend who developed the AI 《Iolite》 together with me."

The past led to the present, the chains of cause and effect.

"Just as I told Taiga-kun in the specialized lecture today, Kiritou is an emerging power. The cyber market was dominated by three large companies before. In that market, Kiritou attempted to interrupt their supremacy and benefit from it."

"There's a lot of rumours about that. Like if it doesn't profit, your actions will be limited."

"That rumour is true, my father is such a person."

"I see, so that's where the mental structure interference comes in. It could derive enormous profits if it could be utilized as a weapon. However, Asumi Aoko was it? For her to develop it alone..."

"Aoko-san had an incredible top class talent."

Haya's attitude as she exposed the dark side of her household was indifferent. She just relayed the facts to them. Even though she appeared to be a bit worried about it, she couldn't afford to bother with that now.

"...so, why is that damn virus in Iora?"

"I don't know that myself. The project was aborted in the first place, the virus should be unfinished as well."

"Unfinished?"

"I've heard that all the data involved in its development was disposed of and lost. And even though it shouldn't exist anymore..."

"Let's ignore that for the moment. That reaper———certainly, it was called Iolite. What caused that runaway AI's rampage?"

"I don't know that as well. When I attempted to delete a program I didn't remember writing, which appeared between two scans, it suddenly started up in the middle of it and took that appearance."

The deletion was probably a trigger of it to start up, that's what Haya meant.

It was possible that program code was hidden, and set to appear with specific timing———with something like this.

But there were too many things to take in at once.

Now that Aoko was dead, the only one who could access internal information was Haya. Even if someone tried to access it without

authorization, the barrier she developed with Aoko to prevent that wouldn't be broken so easily.

"Iora who went on a rampage, to borrow Fuyuki-san's words let's call her a reaper. The reaper has implanted 《Jail》 into the mental structures of twenty-three researchers from Kiritou before she ran away. You know what happened after that."

"What happened with those twenty-three people?"

"They were transported into hospital in an unconscious state. They didn't wake up after being left by her unlike Saionji-san, they completely lost their mental structure. Also... Saionji-san will soon be the same."

".....!!"

Confronted with the facts again, Rui lowered her face.

As if a thread was cut, she hugged her body tightly like she was losing feeling in it.

"The amount you were infected with was smaller thanks to short contact time, and I implanted an antibody program in your consciousness to reduce the erosion, but it doesn't mean its completely suppressed. You will be completely eroded by tomorrow."

Just when Haya finished explaining the circumstances indifferently, she had an interactive communication call.

After Haya saw the name displayed in the window, she frowned and said "Excuse me." before leaving the hospital room.

A silence dominated the room.

Rui lost her voice because of the situation she was in, Fuyuki clasped her hands gently comforting her best friend. And Taiga blamed himself.

"...It's my fault."

He squeezed the words regretfully. She was cut right in front of him.

It was a distance at which he should have prevented it, he should have power to block it, and because he awkwardly stood in one spot, it led to an irreparable situation.

"If I didn't stand there carelessly, the reaper wouldn't have hit you. If I was stronger, I could defeat that alone, I don't care if I were to be cut, Rui wouldn't be cut like that in front of me!"

"Taiga... that's——"

Although Rui wanted to deny it, she was stopped by Fuyuki's silence. Noticing anger swirling in the back of her eyes, she closed her mouth.

"Eight years, I've been training desperately for eight years, and still nothing has changed! What 『Save everyone in front of myself』 ! I couldn't even save one person in front of me!"

Fuyuki walked slowly towards her brother who continued to curse himself.

And she raised her right hand with all the strength she had,

"——stop spouting crap, shaddup, idiot Onii."

slap, a loud sound came out as his cheek was hit.

Taiga, surprised by her unexpected behaviour, looked up at the beautiful sky blue pupils that displayed anger.

"Ah, geez... Rucchan! It will be loud so please block your ears! Little Sister is going to preach to this idiot!"

"It's a hospital room so be as quiet as possible〜"

"Fuyuki, what are you sudden——"

"Be silent for a moment, Onii! Also, sit in seiza!"

Riled up Fuyuki went back to calling him 『Onii』 from 『Ani』 . Partly because of the atmosphere, Taiga sat down on the floor after getting off the hospital chair.[1]

"Little Sister is so upset her head's gotten weird! It's all your fault? What kind of crazy nonsense are you talking about!"

"No, but——"

"It isn't just Onii, Little Sister is responsible for the fact that Rucchan turned out like this as well!"

"Let me say a thing as well, it's no one's responsibility. Rui-san jumped in by herself, the fact that it turned out like this is my responsibility."

Both his cheeks were pinched by Fuyuki, and her face approached his.

The beautiful sky blue eyes looked as if they were to suck him in, and she conveyed her thoughts to him straight.

"I don't know what kind of lifestyle Onii led at Renjou's. However, to Little Sister it seems like 『No matter what happens, I'll shoulder it by myself』 was decided from the beginning... and that, is annoying me a lot, it angers me to the point I can't take it."

"...ngh."

His heart bounced at these words. It was a lucky guess.

『Renjou Taiga』 was a person who wasn't protected, but the one who did the protecting, he was a human who stood at the top. Depending on his actions people's life and death was decided. He had no choice but to shoulder everything by himself.

Fuyuki conveyed her thoughts further.

"I'll say it clearly. I don't know about the real world, but Onii is just a beginner in Elysion. Know your place. Also, understand one more thing, now you have Little Sister with you."

Even when he was blessed with strongest subordinates, Taiga was always alone. He had no people whom he could cry and laugh together with.

He only needed the strength adults requested from him.

"No matter how far you go, I will always stand next to you——please don't forget that."

——For some reason. When she said she will always stand by his side, he was incredibly happy.

He finally could whisper the words, "I'm not alone".

No matter where he ends up, with this he could still believe.

"...Fuyuki."

"Yes. What is it?"

Fuyuki smiled gently. He wanted to convey something to her, but he couldn't find appropriate words.

"...thank you, for being my little sister."

He put all his thoughts in such mundane words.

"Fufufu, Little Sister being your little sister is natural right? What are you talking about now?"

"Well I guess. But that's just what I thought."

They were separated for eight years, it was so long it wouldn't be strange if their hearts drifted apart.

Even so, she still had him in mind, with all of her heart. Taiga understood with his heart rather than his mind just how strong her feelings for him were.

"...ahh, come on, Brother is so cute!"

And, with that as an impulse Fuyuki came at him and hugged him with all her strength, while he was still sitting. Entirety of her small yet soft chest pressed against his face, and a sweet fragrance filled his nostrils.

"Mugha... wa-wait, Fuyuki?!"

"Seeing such weakness it's unbearable! OniiOniiOniiOniiOniii!"

His physical strength was in contrast with the fragility of his mind. That gap moved her heart.

"...Mu—..."

Looking at the siblings by the bed, Rui closed her lips tightly. Even though, to be exact it was Fuyuki hugging Taiga, but it was all the same to Rui.

——Not fair.

The two of them had a special atmosphere between them, and she was so envious she couldn't stand it.

She wondered, if that was why she extended her hand grabbing Taiga's ear unconsciously.

"Eh? Ru-Rui? ——Ow, it hurts it hurts it hurts!"

She grabbed it tightly and pulled.

"Mu—, Mu—, Mu—!!"

"Wa-wait a second, it hurts! Did I do anything?!"

Taiga was confused because he was punished not knowing the reason. Rui just kept pulling and twisting his ear like a child without telling why. Fuyuki's gaze suddenly sharpened.

"...what are you doing?"

And, coming back unnoticed, Haya looked down on him as if he was garbage, with a good looking smile on her face.

"Um, no, this is..."

"A carnage? Two-timing is the worst."[2]

"It's a serious situation in a different sense!"

That façade, she definitely knew what's going on, and yet said that.

Fuyuki stopped hugging him, and Rui stopped pulling on his ear and sat straight. But she looked slightly angry. She sat up without explaining why she had been pulling on his ear.

"Looks like the poisonous air disappeared somehow, is it alright to continue the talk?"

"...go on."

Certainly, the tension caused by his sense of guilt disappeared. He wondered if that's what Fuyuki intended by acting like that——?

...I'm thinking too much into it.

Taiga immediately rejected that guess in his mind.

"Really, it's all because Brother said such things."

"Is that my fault?!"

"No...it's not Taiga's...fault....."

"...Rucchan?"

Suddenly, Rui's condition turned strange.

Her pupils unfocused, her body lost its strength and fell on the bed.

"Hey, Rui?!"

Taiga wanted to approach her in a hurry, but was stopped by Haya.

"Please calm down. She probably just fainted because the erosion has progressed, she will wake up soon."

He was relieved to hear that.

But it wasn't a state where they could be optimistic. Taiga asked Haya straight.

"Haya, what do we have to do to turn Rui back to normal?"

"...the method is very simple. I will create an antibody program that will destroy the cause of abnormality in Iora, the mental structures should all be released and restored. However, there are some concerns."

"Concerns... is there a time limit?"

"A time limit? What do you mean?"

"...the mental structure, in other words, if there's no soul it can't be logged into Elysion, she has to be a proper entity."

If the mental structure disappears, there's no recovering. Currently it's the common belief that there's some kind of connection between the mind structure and body.

That's why in Elysion, a bowl called virtual body replaces the substance required for mental structure.

"However, if 《Jail》 erodes the mental structure, the connection might be cut off."

"If the connection is cut off, is that bad?"

"It's very bad. Brother please think about it. You cannot return to the original location after that thread is cut. Even if the mental structure is intact, it doesn't mean anything if it can't go back to the body."

"Wha..... then, then Rui will——"

"Taiga-kun, calm down. It won't happen immediately. In Saionji's case the erosion isn't done yet, also there's still a possibility of re-connecting it after it's eroded."

He was somewhat relieved by those words. And, Fuyuki asked further details.

"In that case, do you know roughly how much time is left?"

"Unfortunately I don't know the exact time... but it won't be too fast."

If she doesn't recover her mental structure as soon as possible, there's a worst case possibility Rui will never wake up.

A day, maybe three days, even if he asks... he has to hurry anyway.

"And one more thing. Since there's a barrier around Iora, it's impossible to inject the program in that state. Someone has to destroy the barrier by attacking her..."

"The stage is 《Aries》, there's no choice but to do it by force... Brother?"

"I know... that's my role"

Taiga swore to her as she slept, and muttered the words with resolution.

Part 2

——She had a dream.

She felt as if she was floating on uncertain waters, and nevertheless, she felt at peace.

She continued to look at her memories with dulled thinking ability.

It were memories from the four last days, but even though the time was short the memories had a high density.

That time repeated again and again, and Saionji Rui continued to replay those last four days.

Suddenly, her field of view was dyed crimson. It seemed like it came to steal it.

No way. I'm not going to give it up.

It didn't hear her. The crimson continued to take away her dreams, and soon faded away as if satisfied. She wondered just how many times this 『Predation』 repeated.

The tape called memory, was literally eaten away little by little.

She was exhausted by being eaten away at, she knew that even as she slept.

Even so, just that, just those feelings, she will definitely not forget.

Thinking like that, Saionji Rui immersed herself in the memory.

Suddenly, she woke up.

"Hey, sleeping beauty. Are you awake?"

".....aa...eh...? Tai...ga...?"

She turned in the direction the voice came from, she wondered if he kept watching her, it was the figure of ***** Taiga sitting down on a chair in a white room.

E...h...?

Weird... the information she should have was missing from her head. As she moved her gaze after being attacked by anxiety, what entered her field of view was a white wall and a darkened night sky.

"It's already night?"

"You slept for about three hours. ...that fake yamato nadeshiko, what kind of 『she will wake up』 was it. We were insanely worried..."

Taiga muttered under his nose and took out a plastic bottle filled with water from the refrigerator, and held it out to her. Rui was thirsty so she accepted it——but it dropped down on the bed.

"....ah."

"There."

Taiga caught the plastic bottle that almost fell off the bed.

...I see, my right hand is messed up as well now.

Somehow, she recognized the state she was in, as if she was talking about someone else.

There still wasn't anything wrong with her sight and hearing, she would go mad if that was the case——it wasn't a theory, but an intuition.

"...ho, then I'll help you drink it then."

Taiga opened the cap, and helped her drink the water while making sure she didn't choke.

Just because she couldn't muster much strength he moved, even though she could drink it by herself if she used both hands.

"Thank you, Taiga."

"You're welcome. How's your memory?"

"Nn〜it's more or less alright."

She was in a state that normally would cause fear to crush her, but she answered with a smile.

Beaming with a radiant smile blowing away the negative feelings, hiding her helplessness in the deepest corner of her heart.

Because she knew that's the only thing she can do.

『It's my fault』, she knew that was the only way to heal the heart of the boy in front of her.

"I see... and more specifically?"

"Nn〜 memories of middle school first year disappeared as if they never existed. Ah, and also I don't know Taiga's and Fuyuki's last name anymore."

"...isn't this serious?"

"That's why, tell me?"

"...it's Tenryo. Tenryo Taiga, and Tenryo Fuyuki."

"Tenryo, Tenryo Taiga... Tenryo Fuyuki..."

Before the girl who tried to remember it, Taiga was also aware of his own powerlessness.

But it was not the time to regret. It's not possible for Tenryo Taiga to save her now. And because he can't do it, he needs to use this time well.

"Then——Rui. Umm... tomorrow, will you go on a date with me?"

"...oui?"

Being suddenly invited 『?』 mark appeared as she smiled.

Next day, eight forty in the morning.

"Well then, I'm off."

Taiga sat on a chair in the dive room and fixed his breathing. Fuyuki was on the other hand sitting on the floor tired after working all night and just raised her hand seeing her brother off.

"Yes. Please send Rucchan my regards. Little Sister is so focused on work she doesn't have time to contact her. My apologies."

"I know. About that program, I leave it to you. ——Dive Start."

Taiga started up arclight, and his consciousness moved to Elysion.

The mental structure was as usual, transferred to the virtual body. But the log in destination was different.

It was not 《Aries》 which was currently sealed off, but a public structure anyone could enter for free.

There are many various types of structures.

It was just like Aries which was a game that used surplus processing power, but the amount it used was very small and barely around 0.1%.

Unlike a special structure like Aries, most of the city structures for public use mimicked reality. They were literally an existence that was a 『Second world』 .

When it comes to the city the three of them lived in, the structure was referred to as 『Virtual New City』 .

This virtual area imitated the real New City, a small world mimicking it.

Of course, if citizens couldn't access it it wouldn't be a public structure——that's what an urban structure was.

"...so. I came here for the first time, but it is a mysterious place."

He felt light-headed for a moment, his virtual body was in front of the station.

The city entrance——this was the location everyone was sent to when they logged in to 『Virtual New City』 for the first time, the station. Though it was called a station, the linears were not running.

When he looked up, there a number of strange coloured cubes floated in the sky, displaying information and news.

Buildings, roads, everything, the futuristic city looked somehow surreal.

Those guys couldn't stop themselves from doing whatever they please, such a thing...

In fact, there's a lot of incidents where people fall into malnutrition after continuously diving for a long time.

Since he wasn't using a small headgear type arclight used at homes but one with life support system, continuous diving should not cause any serious consequences.

"Well then. Just as I've been told by Fuyuki, I came twenty minutes before the promised time."

In front of him, there was another visitor in the meeting place they decided together a day before.

"Why are you here already..."

Even though he intended to go over there before she came——but Fuyuki's advice was defeated. And, then she came over while waving cheerfully after noticing him.

Chestnut fluffy hair, a girl wearing irregular daring clothes.

Having a natural charm that attracted people's gazes, it was Saionji Rui.

Why were the two of them on a date at a time like this.

It's something they talked about yesterday, before Rui woke up.

"Role, is it... certainly, the only one who can fight back against it, is only Brother, but do you have a chance? Taking the previous battle into consideration, I don't think Brother has any?"

"Ugh..."

Although he said something cool, he was at a loss for words when he was told that.

Even if he was caught off guard, but he would be defeated anyway if he continued to fight like that. And, for some reason his body acted weird during the battle.

"...you didn't think about it. As expected."

"Well well, isn't that just like Taiga-kun. Making a rash decision and ending up looking uncool."

He noticed it just now, but Haya and Fuyuki were quite similar.

"But there's no need to worry. This wonderful cute Little Sister will think about it. ——Give Little Sister a day, and I will determine the reason for Brother's malfunction, I'll do something about the difference in strength."

Fuyuki looked straight at him, and that look increased the feelings of helplessness he had.

Twenty-four hours. During that time, he could do nothing but look at his best friend, Rui to break in silence.

Even so, Fuyuki would not budge.

In order to save her, in order to avoid failing no matter what. She would not budge.

Because Taiga understood that, he prepared himself.

"...I get it. I leave it to you, Fuyuki."

He left it to her. And his little sister went home immediately.

"I need to complete the antibody program as well, so excuse me. I will be done by tomorrow as well."

"I see. So, what should I do now..."

He couldn't spend time not doing anything.

Looks like they will be skipping school tomorrow, he thought about going to train after all, but Fuyuki proposed another plan.

"Brother, please stay together with Rucchan the entire time. She will be insecure and anxious alone. I don't mind if you go on a date or something you know? I give you special permission."

"D-date? No, but Rui can't walk..."

"If it's that it'll be alright. Kaichou-san, does this hospital lend virtual bodies that are operated by thoughts?"

"One can be prepared right away."

"It's decided then. Brother, tomorrow go on a date in Elysion tomorrow."

Their conversation skipped a lot of steps. Well he was worried about Rui, and he wasn't against going out together... still he couldn't help but get nervous considering it was a date.

"It will go well, Little Sister will give you advice. In exchange, please go on a date with Little Sister later, okay?"

That's it. Recollection end.

Taiga rushed over and uttered a word of apology.

"Sorry, did you wait long?"

"Mm, no, Rui-san just arrived as well."

The male and female roles were perfectly reversed from what Fuyuki told him. He couldn't calm down feeling guilty, he started the day he was supposed to spend with Rui thinking like that.

An innocent smile like usual, and her clothes were hot pants and a tank top.

Meaning, Rui wanted to look attractive today.

...did she change for me?

He didn't know how to call it, but today she was——cute.

It didn't mean she isn't normally cute. It meant... that a very pretty atmosphere surrounded her body.

He wondered if that was the magic of a date.

"...uh—umm, is your body alright? The thought-operated virtual body, was it?"

"Yup. It was difficult to move at first, but I've got used to it."

Rui moved her hands she couldn't budge in the real world, to show him.

The virtual body she was using was one often used in hospitals, it's a virtual body working on a special mechanism allowing it to move by using images in a human's head. It's mainly used for people with disabilities.

——She, who cannot move in the real world anymore, can move freely in Elysion. Realizing what he sees right now is just an illusion, his heart ached.

"Now then... let's go."

Shaking off that sentiment, he held out his right hand.

Even if you don't cross your arms, at least hold her hand——just as Fuyuki advised him.

"...yup."

Her cheeks flushed slightly, Rui overlapped her hand with his. And their fingers firmly entangled, this was the so called lovers tie.

"Ehehe..."

Rui laughed slightly embarrassed for a moment, looking very lovely.

Because she was so attractive Taiga turned away when they started to walk to hide his bright red face.

——Just at this moment, he wanted her to forget about reality and enjoy herself.

While feeling each other's warmth from their connected hands, their date began.

From that moment, the two of them toured a lot of places.

Starting with window shopping, the two had a good time at karaoke and aquarium, after which they took a break at an open air café's terrace.

Above a cup of tea that was a combination of taste data, Saionji Rui observed the boy in front of her.

...super cool, well not really. But I wonder why? My eyes are attracted to him. The difference between the front and the back, I wonder if I like the gap between his everyday self and the feeling he gives off occasionally?

She had a strange taste, even if she said so herself. It was a pretty dangerous choice.

Because her memories were ragged out, she didn't know much about their relationship before, but somehow 『Saionji Rui』 felt he was someone she could get along with.

In a broad, and shallow sense. She thought to herself he might be 『Special』 to her.

And, noticing her gaze, their eyes met.

"What is it? Is there something?"

"No— Rui-san is pretty strange, I wasn't aware I was staring at you—"

"If Rui is strange, then both me and Fuyuki would be categorized as madmen."

"Ahaha, that's not true!"

"I wonder about that. At the very least, the environments we were brought up in was abnormal."

"Nn— it was something like special forces or something right?"

"...asking about it while being perfectly calm is amazing but... calling it special forces, it isn't all that wrong. I saw guns and military drones on a daily basis, it was a place people killed each other in reality. The place I was taken to... well, was the worst."

Even so, he didn't think about the everyday life he lost.

Because he was going to go back there someday——that's what he decided in his mind, he had a 『World he should return to』 so he didn't despair.

"...you probably heard about it from Fuyuki, but I was in unexpectedly old fashioned home."

"Geez. Every country has unmanned weapons as their primary force nowadays, for people to go between such things, even if you trained it's some insane stuff."

A place where monsters with abnormal physical ability met.

Taiga didn't criticize the Renjou household that much. He learned sword techniques, and observing people around him he learned to handle and hone his body.

"Can it be, that you were bullied?"

"...why do you think so?"

"Well, somehow. You had kind of a pained look. I wondered if you went through some bitter experience, or something like that."

She's sharp.

His expressions barely changed, and yet he was read this precisely.

"Well, it's humans. There's always some guy who hates you and might hurt you. ...though I repaid him after becoming strong."

"Ahaha..."

At that moment a clerk brought a strange object. It was a pile of fruits and ice cream that looked like an inverted triangle, and for some reason it didn't spill out.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. It's the special parfait you ordered."

"Ooh〜 it's here, its here!"

"Eh, what's this. A parfait... is that a joke?"

"Nfufufu〜 because the object has specified fixed coordinates it will not collapse."

A huge parfait was soundly placed in front of them after arriving. Although its appearance was worthy of being called special, but no matter what, that was over the top.

"Hmm... this is also a combined program stimulating the taste. Though when it isn't placed in a belly, it feels somewhat creepy."

"Hmph〜 stop thinking like that. Taiga should eat some as well. It's delicious you know?"

"...well then, just a bite."

"Yay, it's here, come on, a—n!"

Rui scooped up a mouthful, and held it out to Taiga.

"Wai- Rui?!"

"Hohoo, you see that's the kind of store this is."

He suddenly noticed that around them there were a lot of couples, some of them were eating the same parfait, and some were drinking stereotypical 『 Couple Juice』 together.

But——her cheeks were red as she held out the spoon, and he noticed that her hand was trembling from nervousness, so he couldn't say anything.

It was just a moment later, but, he made his decision and ate the piece of parfait that was held out.

"...it's delicious."

"Right—!"

He thought it would be just sweet, but it wasn't so. It was cold and sweet spreading in his mouth. It wasn't only the taste that was programmed, there was also an after-taste and refreshing fragrance of fruits drifting around.

"...ehehe, it's an indirect kiss."

"Goouh?! Y-you?!"

"I wonder if rather than with Fuyuki, your first experience was with Rui-san?"

"...excluding the time we were kids, it's my first."

Of course it was with Fuyuki. Rui knowing that, looked somewhat regretful.

"I see. Looks like I can't win against Fuyuki after all—"

"I don't think it's a matter of winning or losing you know?"

In the first place it was talk about when they were kids. Not something they did consciously.

"That might be so. But... I just wanted to be number one."

Especially, when it came to the person she liked——but she didn't have courage to continue like that, she as of now couldn't say that yet.

Wanting to shake off those heavy thoughts from her mind, she changed the topic.

"Speaking of which, when did you become friends with Kaichou-san?"

"Nn? Ah—... we met on the specialized course by chance. And we spoke quite often after that."

"So that's how it is. For some reason Kaichou-san, treats Taiga and Rui-san differently— or so I was thinking, I wonder if it's my imagination? Even though she's your senpai you get along with her really well."

"...I-it's your imagination. Come on, let's hurry up and go to the next location."

Faced with her sharp questions, Taiga changed the topic. Even though Rui had seen through him, 『I'll ask some other time』 she thought as she scooped some more of the parfait.

At the same time, in Kiritou Academy's structure.

"...*kshun*"

A small sneeze echoed.

Haya continued the development of the antibody program while sitting on the sofa in her room, 『A cold at a time like this?』 she thought and examined the vitals of her body.

"All values normal... I wonder if someone is gossiping about me."

She assumed it was some researcher... or it might be him. She took a small break from work until she settled down after thinking something unnecessary.

As a lot of fatigue had accumulated, she laid down on the sofa and daydreamed while looking at the ceiling.

...I want to return to the laboratory, but I would probably be surrounded by other researchers and questioned.

Because, blocking a large structure like Aries was unprecedented. Though at that time there was no other way than to do that, the reason didn't matter.

The fact that she developed that AI would add fuel to the fire as well.

Currently, Haya was in a delicate position in the company.

"Because of that I don't have access to the facilities... seriously. Even though there's no time!"

One day. It was the grace time the company gave her.

If the situation doesn't improve Iora will be destroyed——she will lose. Last time she won the negotiations.

They were people who want to see results above anything else. There's twenty-three unconscious people, so they didn't want to destroy her right away.

If it was exposed that Saionji was subjected to 《jail》 it would be bad. It would damage them a lot if news that they allowed a civilian to get involved in it got out.

The forced transition she did already stood out. If it came out to the public it would cause a scandal involving Kiritou——that's why the higher ups left it to her.

They wanted to avoid any bad rumours about Kiritou. And absolutely avoid scandals. Although it was as if she put a rope around her own neck, she got a chance to save Iora.

——She had to stick with it. That's what she thought. Not because she was her developer.

Because Iora was her dream.

Because the girl named Kiritou Haya was always lonely.

She could not make any friends because of rumours about her household. The only ones who approached her were adults who wanted to get closer to Kiritou.

Act like an adult——that's what her father, who was on the top of the company ordered her. She was instructed not to give anyone a chance to take advantage of her, and like a tyrant, forbade her from acting childish.

As the person in question, Haya, grew up, she got more and more isolated from the environment even if she didn't intend to.

That's why, that was the only dream she had.

——She wanted a friend.

As she grew up hiding her childishness behind an adult mask, she met someone who had similar thoughts. Asumi Aoko, and started a project.

Making an existence she could be friends with——a virtual personality with emotions, the development of project Lolite.

That's why she had to protect it. The form of a dream she had together with her late friend, even more so now that she has people who supported her, she has to protect it no matter what.

"...just wait. I will definitely save you. No matter what I have to do."

Haya said those words even though she knew no one will hear her anyway, and resumed work.

They somehow managed to eat the huge parfait together, it wasn't something one person could eat. And then they went on the streets once again.

They enjoyed their time in a relaxed manner walking around, Rui showed interest in the accessories arranged on the stall.

"Waa— this one is wonderful..."

Rui took a pendant shaped like sun in her hand. The design was quite elaborate, even Taiga who wasn't familiar with this kind of thing was impressed.

By the way, even though it's called a stall, they didn't sell anything in there. It was a place that could be used for sampling things, it was a mechanism that allowed you to order the thing in the real world.

"That's certainly beautiful. Also, it would look great on Rui."

He looked at its price. It was a little high, but if it was just that much it should work out.

"I'll buy this. Send it to this place."

"Eh...? Nonono you can't! Aren't you short on living expenses?"

"It will work out if I fast a little. Also, it's a present not only to commemorate the date, but also a sign of gratitude."

"Gratitude?"

"Ever since I moved, I was always taken care of by Rui. This is something like an appreciation gift... thank you, and I'll be in your care from now on, that's why please take it."

He conveyed his feelings of gratitude to her upfront.

He really was always taken care of by Rui. Things like school, meals, Aries, and also that she became Fuyuki's friend. He couldn't thank her enough.

He was honestly embarrassed, but it was something he had to say properly.

The person in question, Rui was dumbfounded. It was nothing special to her, she just did what she could do——and yet as she was being sincerely thanked for that, she thought he was very cute as he said that.

...I feel that I can somehow understand what Fuyuki meant when she said he's cute.

At the same time, she understood she can't refuse his feelings.

"I see. Then, don't hold back with your present."

"Right."

It would arrive in two days, for the time being until the purchase procedures were done, she got data with the specification of the accessory as a bonus. That meant she could use the same fashion in both the real world and Elysion.

"Ah. This is perfect. Taiga, put it on me."

"Eh? N-no at least do that yourse——"

"Come on, hurry up hurry up."

While maintaining the momentum, she got close to him by a step and removed the pendant's clasp.

As Rui closed her eyes and looked up, looking as if she was prepared for a kiss, Taiga moved his hand behind her neck trying not to stare at her as much as possible.

He tried to place the pendant on from the front. But, it didn't seem to work because he was too stiff.

"Taiga—. It will be hard unless you get closer you know?"

"Uu, n-no, I know that but..."

But if he approaches her any more than that... he would get in close contact with various things. Especially with her large breasts——is what he thought but couldn't say.

However, so as not to make Rui wait any longer, after a few more seconds of struggle, he made his decision and approached her by taking a step forward.

"————"

"Hou..."



From a third person's point of view. It could only look like a couple hugging each other. That's how close the two of them were. Soft twin hills of size incomparable to Fuyuki's pressed against him slightly above his stomach, and a happy feeling spread through his body.

I knew they are big but... t-this is dangerous...!

It wasn't just the feeling of her body, the sight and the smell were dangerous as well.

Looking down from above, her body was destructively attractive, on top of that her chestnut fluffy hair smelled very good. If he was to compare it... right, it would be like the sun. Like a warm and soft smell of daylight.

It would turn bad if he continued to stay like that. Taiga fastened the pendant's clasp in a hurry. His sense of smell and touch were stimulated like crazy as he did that, and his spirit was worn out in various ways by the time he finished.

"Ehehe..."

Even so, seeing her smile was worth doing that hard work. That's what he thought.

Rui played with the pendant happily. Although she smiled happily as she looked at it, it suddenly darkened.

"Looks like it's about time..."

They both knew it. No matter how much fun they have, it will eventually come to an end. While there was still light left in her heart, she declared.

"...there's one last place I want to go to."

Rucchan, is probably at her limit...

Fuyuki continued programming at a tremendous speed without moving an inch from the spot, or looking away from the screen even for a moment ever since she saw Taiga off, she checked the time.

Four p.m. —it was the time Kiritou Haya estimated as a limit. Fuyuki looked at the ceiling and thought about the girl who was about to disappear in a distant world.

Tenryo Fuyuki's only friend, the only friend of a girl who used to be Karasuba Fuyuki, Saionji Rui.

A person who reached out a helping hand to her after she was torn apart from her beloved brother, her important best friend.

"...don't worry and please wait. I'll save you right away."

Fuyuki went back to work after murmuring that.

Right now there's one thing she had to do, she couldn't think about anything else.

"Just a little more, one more stretch and it's done."

With her sky blue eyes shining, Fuyuki plunged into the sea of electrons.

"Yup. No matter when I come it's always beautiful here—"

In the scenery dyed in scarlet, chestnut hair danced in accordance to Rui's movements, it glittered reflecting particles of light cast by the setting sun.

The light scattered every time her hair flowed in the strong wind, wrapping her in a gentle and warm ambience.

"...yeah, certainly it's beautiful."

There is a place I want to go to——saying that she brought him to a viewing platform on a small hill in the outskirts of 《Virtual New City》.

There might have been some people there if it was a holiday, but there was no one there during daytime on a weekday. Also it wasn't reality so there were no people who would come over on a whim.

There were only two of them on the viewing platform looking down on the city.

Taiga and Rui stood side by side looking at the fantasy-like city.

"...why, do you think I chose to come here last?"

The words she murmured melted away carried by the wind. Still, they easily reached him, Taiga answered her while looking at the scenery of the city spread below.

"Because the scenery is beautiful, I guess."

"Unfortunately, a miss... but isn't it? It's not like it isn't beautiful. But the answer is incorrect."

Only last pieces of memory were left in her head, even the recent memories were becoming a mess.

Even Saionji's Rui personality was becoming ambiguous. Together with her thoughts, her virtual body slowly stopped to respond and move.

The appointed time, was about to come soon.

"One day. When I found a person I like, I would end the date here——that's what I decided. I'd prefer if it was reality, but in this state it can't be helped."

"Isn't it all right. After returning to your body, you can go there together with the person you like."

"Ahahaha, you don't get it at all do you — Taiga. It's important for it to be the first time. Seeing the sunset together... it feels like fate. Wonderful isn't it?"

"So it's like that."

"That's how it is... can we sit down? In fact, it's a bit hard to stand."

They sat on a bench, and looked at the sun sinking behind the horizon in a relaxed manner. Then, Rui placed her head on Taiga's shoulder.

".....It's scary, after all."

He heard a small voice.

"Even though, I should be prepared for it... but... the fact that I might disappear... is scary..."

"...Rui."

"Why did something like that happen!! It should have been just a normal day like usual!! Even though, ever since Taiga came every day became more interesting and fun, why do I have to go through something like this?!"

The chain of emotions held in by force burst, it exploded.

Not knowing why was it her, why wasn't it someone else——even though she knew it was synonymous with hoping for someone else's misfortune, she couldn't help but think so.

Tenryo Taiga was a boy who was crushed once in reality, so he understood her pain.

"...I don't want to disappear..."

Large tears fell one after another, fear that has been suppressed until now, the things she was afraid of, surfaced one after another.

——Because he didn't want to see such a face, that's why he's gotten stronger, didn't he.

"...the one who should have been cut is me, the one who was supposed to fade away should be me. Because you protected me, I can be here. That's why—— the fact you were the one cut, I'll make sure it wasn't meaningless."

There was a meaning in the fact that Tenryo Taiga remained and not Saionji Rui, he will prove that there was a reason for it and it will lead to something.

"——I swear. That's why wait for me. It'll be over soon."

He will definitely save her——he won't allow anyone to be sacrificed.

The moment he feels that there's a need to sacrifice something precious, his existence will become meaningless.

".....aaa....."

Sky blue eyes looked straight at her, as if sucking her in. It reminded her of a majestic sky encompassing everything, Rui made a small sigh.

Yeah——with this, I'm done for ~



"——Yup.

I will be
waiting,
my Prince."

There was no
doubt about it.

Confirming it,
while on verge of
disappearing was
just like her.

Unnecessary things
like suspension bridge
effect came to her
mind, but it didn't
matter.

That's why she saw
him off with a
great smile on her
face, believing in him.

Because she will see
him again soon.

There was no doubt about it.

Confirming it, while on verge of disappearing was just like her.

Unnecessary things like suspension bridge effect came to her mind, but it didn't matter. That's why she saw him off with a wonderful smile on her face believing in him. Because she will see him again soon.

She wiped the tears that spilled.

In the beautiful orange sunset, the scarlet colour burned in her heart.

Here and now, certainly in her heart,

"———Yup. I will be waiting, my Prince."

Saionji Rui closed her eyes.

Her eyes closed as if she was asleep, they wouldn't open no matter what.

Basking in the sunset's light, Taiga continued to hug her body as strength gradually left it.

Chapter 5 - Area of the Fastest and the Strongest

Part 1

"Unh..."

Awaiting Taiga's return to the real world was his little sister who rolled around groaning, he wasn't sure if it couldn't be classified as cute——probably. He guessed.

"...just when did this place turn into demon world?"

If it had to be explained why he said that, it was because the room's appearance changed completely from how it was in the morning.

The number of windows floating in mid-air could already be counted in hundreds. Holograms were deployed in every direction, on every wall, and even on the ceiling.

Reality and cyber intermingled, it looked quite chaotic.

"Fuyuki~, are you alright—?"

He hesitated to get closer to the motionless Fuyuki, and called out to her. He was afraid of compromising and causing holograms to disappear in response to his movement. She was lying down on the floor fatigued and her glossy black hair was scattered on it, the pretty girl feeling she usually had was ruined because of that.

When he placed a hand on her forehead but it was considerably hot, but she seemed alright. It wasn't a cold, it was something like intelligence heat, caused by overworking her brain.

"...seriously, so reckless."

He sighed, then he crouched and picked up Fuyuki's body.

After that, he carried her to bedroom surprised about how small and light she was, and laid her down on the huge bed. Fuyuki curled up like a cat.

"Unyaa..."

She was in a state where she would need to keep her eyes open with small sticks. But she somehow shook off sleepiness and rubbed her eyes.

"My head.....it's so heavy..."

"Keep lying down like you are now, I'll bring you something to drink."

Taiga was familiar with how it felt to use the brain to its limit. Although he wanted to let her go sleep as soon as possible, it couldn't be helped this time.

He passed her a cup of coffee he brewed as a cure for drowsiness, he also added milk and gum syrup to it. Although it should still be quite bitter, bitterness should increase the effect and wake her up.

"Uuhh... it's been a while since I did my best like this..."

Fuyuki continued to process vast amounts of information in her head ever since yesterday, except for a moment she took to eat and take a shower. Also, she was thinking at an exceptionally fast rate.

While Taiga's weapon was physical speed, Fuyuki's weapon was the speed she was thinking at.

A capability of processing many things in parallel, ability to deal with multiple events that was far beyond a normal person's, and an intuition, a sixth sense when it came to cyber-related things.

On par with Taiga's 『Eye』 in reality, she had a 『Eye』 for the Elysion."

It wasn't some kind of supernatural power, it was just using the human brain to its very limits.

But it didn't change the fact that it was quite absurd.

If her brain was used for a long time, she could collapse and wake up only three day after.

"Good job, Fuyuki. Thanks."

Taiga knew just how tired she was, so he stroked her head.

Funya~, she enjoyed the feeling with a charming expression on her face for a moment, and shortly after she corrected her posture. The look in her eyes became serious.

"...well then, let's get down to the main issue."

Taiga retracted his hand and looked at her, Fuyuki operated the terminal, opening a window that projected a crystal.

The mysterious crystal changed its colour depending on his viewing angle as it floated in front of Taiga's eyes, and a small window emerged from its body.

«"Submit permission to install program 《Synchro Infinity》 sent from Tenryo Fuyuki. 『YES』 or 『NO』 ?"»

"Let me say this first. This program will definitely be of help to Brother during his fight with the Reaper. It perfectly fixes the malfunctions with Brother's body."

Even though fatigue obscured her thinking as she spoke. Fuyuki had to tell that much, she formed words while forcing her own mind.

"The studies Little Sister was involved in while at Karasuba was 『Synchronization of virtual and real body』 and she helped to make this application. But because of the high risk research has been frozen. 《Synchro Infinity》 is without a doubt a dangerous program a researcher should never create."

"...dangerous, and more specifically?"

"Life-threatening level dangerous."

His little sister answered instantly as she stared right at him.

——It was not a domain he should step into with half-assed determination.

"When it comes to risk, it probably exceeds 《Jail》. One wrong move and you will become a cripple."

Fuyuki looked completely serious, and it seemed like she was not exaggerating.

"This program, 《Synchro Infinity》 is a high risk no return for a normal person, completely pointless for them to use. But Elysion specific mechanism works in a way that has a negative effect on Brother."

"Specific mechanism?"

"Half of Elysion was made for entertainment purposes, factors that induce negative feelings have been eliminated as much as possible. They are either cut off or restricted, pain is a prime example."

"Well, no one would like to feel pain in a structure like 《Aries》."

You can get cut, crushed, burned, and so on. If those feelings were left unchanged people would not be able to stand pain.

"《Aries》 provides physical ability assistance according to rank, although it's a system original to the structure that helps you enjoy it, at the same time it tunes the virtual body making it deviate from original."

It wasn't reality, so they dropped what was unnecessary.

That's why it was impossible to tune a virtual body to be exactly same as a real one.

"In the first place, a normal person doesn't use their body's full performance, so a slight difference does not affect them... but it's different when it comes to Brother's physical ability that was trained to the limit, and when it comes to our 『Eyes』."

For someone who has reflexes and dynamic vision far beyond a normal person, extra processing is nothing but an obstruction. An error appears when the movement intended and actual movement of the body differ, expanding little by little and eventually ends up disconnecting them.

"So that's why I lost feeling in my arm."

"Yes. That's how it is, the effect this program has is simple. In order to disable the program that creates that difference, it will continue to hack you."

"Hack... me?"

"Full explanation would take three hours, but I'll omit that. There are two main risks. One, the blocked pain is released and the damage dealt to the electronic body is transferred to you. If your arm is cut off, you will receive mental damage as if it really was cut off. If you receive a horrible amount of damage, your spirit might collapse."

Even though it has no effect on his real body if his virtual body is damaged, the pain itself will still damage his spirit.

A wound someone received in the past and the phantom pain unexpectedly appearing afterwards is a perfect example.

"Also the other one. Because it continues to hack so that it can trigger the effect, the burden on the brain is tremendous. Little Sister tried it but only withstood five minutes——that was as long as it went on until my brain started overheating. In Brother's and Little Sister's case, because of our 『Eyes』 the time limit is shorter than usual."

"Another thing that's restricting in various ways, huh."

Receiving attacks is bad on the time limit, and the time is further shortened if it goes through.

"...I'm sorry, Brother."

Fuyuki apologized and bowed her head.

"I tried to reduce the risk somehow, but in the end I couldn't do it. Having Brother fight while using such a flawed program, Little Sister is the worst. I am really sorry..."

Painfully aware of her own shortcoming, Fuyuki continued with her head bowed down.

If she was the one who used the defective crystal, it wouldn't matter because she would only risk herself.

However, this time the one who will be using the program was Taiga. The one risks and the one who is exposed to danger is the person was front of her.

That's why, she had to say it.

"...whether you accept it or not, I leave the decision to Brother. If you don't trust this program, and decide it's too risky——"

click ——he interrupted his little sister's speech by tapping 『 YES 』 . Fuyuki was surprised, but Taiga didn't hesitate.

"I swore. That I would definitely save her. Life-threatening? I am here thanks to Rui, I won't hesitate with just this much."

If he was unable to save her, Tenryo Taiga wouldn't be able to ever forgive himself. If he broke his promise, he wouldn't be able to live anymore. It was no different from dying.

"Also, I believe in Fuyuki."

"...haa, geez, Brother is really hard to handle."

Fuyuki sighed, but she continued somewhat happily.

The crystal shattered turning into small particles and was sucked into Taiga's terminal.

《Install started. Three minutes left.》

That's what was displayed in the window, it switched into a status screen that displayed progress. They could only wait.

And, Fuyuki's body suddenly tilted. He wondered if it was because she has done everything she had to do. It looked like she could no longer fight back against fatigue, and it surged all at once. Her eyelids started to close.

Thanking his little sister for the hard work she has done, he gently pat her head.

"...leave the rest to me. I will definitely save Rui."

Calmed down by his words, her drowsiness increased as he pat her head—
—and Fuyuki smiled faintly before she entered the dream world.

"I believe in you. Brother."

Saying just that much, Fuyuki closed her eyes, and started to breathe sleepily a few seconds later. He covered her looking at her relieved expression, and left the bedroom.

He entered the dive room again, and contacted Haya through the terminal as he prepared to log in.

"I'm prepared on this side."

〈"Okay. Then please come to the school's structure at once. The place will be that classroom. I'm going to break the locks so you can come from the front."〉

All of his senses gradually switched over as he signalized the dive start.

After logging in safely, he confirmed the school's structure as his target and——he stepped into the compartment that was as deserted as in reality.

Come to think of it, the first time I met Iora was here.

At that time, on a whim he just turned on a hologram projector. She didn't appear properly back then and her figure only flashed for a moment.

...if that didn't happen, I wouldn't be acquainted with Haya now.

If he didn't meet Iora back then, he wondered what would be happening now——useless thoughts filled his head as he tried to escape from reality.

Maybe nothing would be happening now. Such a convenient illusion came to him, but it faded away soon after.

"You came."

The privatized classroom has become a weird space where a lot of windows floated all over.

Haya was immersed in work while sitting on the sofa like usual, she still wore the suit he saw the other day.

Because she had the appearance of a Japanese-style beauty, it didn't fit her.

"A little longer and I'll be done. Just wait for a moment."

Haya continued to work while operating at dozens of windows at once, at an incredible pace without looking his way. The fact that she completely concentrated on her work was obvious.

He sat on an edge of the sofa as to not to get in the way. Taiga looked around daydreaming as he had nothing to do in particular. And, as he looked around he saw something that made him feel uncomfortable.

"...nn?"

A lot of windows repeatedly appeared and disappeared——between them, he noticed that one didn't change. He leaned towards it curiously, for some reason it wasn't operated.

It was a picture. And on it, there were two girls.

Haya and... Iora? No, but why is she wearing Kiritou uniform?

It looked like Haya was younger, he wondered if it was taken one or two years ago. But it didn't matter. What he was curious about, was what they were wearing.

Haya aside, it was weird that Iora was wearing a uniform. Also the quality of Iora who was captured in this photo, felt like she wasn't a hologram. It was as if, she was a living human.

What did that mean——he wanted to look closer, but the photo suddenly disappeared.

"Peeping is not good."

Haya was staring at him. Apparently she finished her work, all the windows she used for development disappeared the same way.

"Did you finish?"

"We don't have time to test it, there's no choice but to check if during the battle. Theoretically it should delete Iora's 《Jail》 if she's damaged enough."

As opposed to blood-like crimson, the crystal she had was sky blue.

Though Taiga received it on reflex, it was sucked into his body the instant he touched the crystal. And with that, the installation was complete.

"I see. Then... next, is my job."

With that, everything was ready.

Taiga manipulated the inventory window of 《Aries》 and changed into a long coat, at the same time he checked if his nodachi showed up by his waist.

"...about the picture, don't you want to know?"

Haya asked cautiously as he was preparing for battle. After looking back at her, Taiga honestly answered.

"I won't say I'm not curious about it, but it seems that even if I asked, I wouldn't get an answer."

Just by looking at her, he could tell that she was depressed and in a bad state. He wasn't that insensitive to probe any further in that direction.

"You too are suffering because of something. I think you want to help Iora no matter what... that's enough for you to cooperate with us. So both of us have something we want from the other."

They are partners who had just met a few days earlier. There was no reason to trust each other.

"One of us uses the other. That's the relationship between us right now, right?"

He simplified it, no, he simplified it too much, even Haya was surprised by what he said.

"...that's surprising. Looking at you your relationship with your little sister and Saionji-san , I thought you easily trust people and pushing an idea on you would be piss easy. You're more of a realistic person than I thought you were."

"If it's to save Rui, I won't care about what you are really thinking."

In these words, Haya noticed a glimpse of a similar nature to hers.

Probably, in order to save Saionji Rui, this boy will act without hesitation. Just like her, who didn't care if she was to make the entire company into her enemy if it was to save Iora.

Both of them had similar thoughts and determination.

...why is she that attached to Iora, I think I can understand a little.

Part of the wall changed as Haya snapped her fingers, it changed into a shining white door. It was big enough for one person to pass through it, and he couldn't see what's inside.

"This place and 《Aries》 are temporarily connected. As soon as you go through, I'll disconnect it. You'll be able to contact me from the other side, when you're done, call me."

"Yeah, got it."

Taiga took a step towards the gate he couldn't see anything through. And he heard a voice from behind his back.

"...Taiga, it's an order. You must definitely rescue Iora. If all my effort goes to waste, I won't forgive you."

"I get it. It's not just yours, I also carry Fuyuki's share over here."

Taiga entered the transfer door, setting his foot into 《Aries》 once again.

"——I decided long time ago. That I won't lose ever again."

Part 2

rustle ——He felt hard soil with his feet. Apparently it was daytime in 《Aries》, the sun overhead was shining fiercely.

Here and there on the plains, huge swords were stuck in it. Even though they fought with the Reaper in this place the previous day, it felt like it was a long time ago. The darkness was much more dense in this place before.

...the date, it was really fun.

It was the first time for him to spend his time like that with a girl of the same age. In between the memories of his brutal daily life, it was a memory that shined brightly.

Living together with his little sister, playing with a friend, everyone laughing together.

Such a normal, every day life was extremely precious, he understood that. That's why——

"...I won't forgive you bastard"

In the direction he looked to, was someone with long blood-red hair. The large sickle almost as long as her dress was lowered, an existence that looked like a girl.

He received no answer.

Dead——her eyes had no light in them, no intent, and her hair colour was also in harmony with that word. There, was a Grim Reaper in front of him.

〈"Virtual body confirmed."〉

Her head rotated to face his way, an inorganic cold sound was emitted.

That figure, that sound, they caused a tremendous anger to well up inside of him.

That thing robbed him of it.

The daily life he recovered after waiting for eight years, her bright and warm smile that reminded him of the sun.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

3, 2, 1... together with the countdown he roused all the cells in his body.

〈"Assessment of situation, experiment re——"〉

"——A thank you gift, for what happened when we first met!!!"

In an instant, he jumped right in front of the Reaper and dealt an explosively powerful blow to her with his left fist.

He ignored her unnecessary operation and stopped it with his fist, the Reaper barely reacted to it. As her shoulder was hit her delicate body was blown over twenty meters away.

If it was the real world, that blow would have crushed her shoulder bone.

Whether it was caused by 《Jail》, or whether it was Iora's original characteristic, the Reaper was more durable and the blow wasn't that effective. There wasn't a single scratch on her, not to mention it being fatal.

The Reaper tried to stand up, but was bound at a furious speed,

"And one more blow!!!"

And with his tremendous speed he drilled his fist into her body, and slammed her into the ground.

Her back was nailed to the ground, and a loud impact echoed, in the middle of which was the Reaper. But, even with that she barely sustained any damage.

⟨"Resistance confirmed. Rendering target harmless recommended."⟩

"Wa——"

Taiga intuitively realized that it didn't work, and he half-turned his body while clicking his tongue, and looked for the sickle's strike. While trying to cut her neck at the same time, he blocked the sickle.

That's as far as the first move can get me.

After receiving the strike with his sword, he moved his left leg and kicked the Reaper's right leg from the flank.

Because her posture was not too good a light hit was enough. As she was standing up, Taiga held his nodachi vigilant and kicked off the ground.

**CLANG*!!* Both of them jumped at the same time at their prey, and a high pitched metallic sound rang out. It was just slightly, but the nodachi had less power behind it and was pushed back, the cutting edge of the sickle grazed Taiga's clothes and hit the ground.

——He knew. That as he is right now he couldn't win against Reaper.

Rather than to say he was weaker, it was that he couldn't use his greatest strength.

There was no significant difference between their speed, which was his greatest weapon. If he received a blow from the front it was obvious he would be pushed back.

The time limit of his trump card, 《Synchro Infinity》 was five minutes. It could be shorter depending on usage.

Which meant, if he uses it carelessly the risk would be too high.

There's no other way than to endure it for now...!

If he makes a mistake with timing, it will be Taiga's defeat.

The sickle and nodachi met many, many times, and Taiga was forced back every time.

Even so, Taiga parried the sharp sickle strikes without wasteful movements, deflecting them, and attacked Reaper again.

Rather than to win, it was offensive to make sure he won't lose.

Although she couldn't have guessed Taiga's intention, Reaper's attacks continued to gain momentum, and Taiga paid full attention as well.

"Nh...this brute force, where does it come from...!"

In response to the sickle's slash from the front, he retreated ten meters away from her.

They had exchanged around thirty blows already, yet neither of them even grazed each other. While the Reaper pushed him back with her bodily ability, Taiga competed with his skills and experience.

No matter how strong the Reaper is, her attacks were simple. When it came to defending himself it was not difficult.

"Fuu——"

It might be called a stalemate, but the fact that it continued was because he devoted himself to defence. He didn't use any tricks or skills to breakthrough.

Taiga opened his endlessly sky blue eyes wide,

"It's my turn from now on!!!!"

He threw over a meter long nodachi with all his strength.

If the opponent was a human who had feelings, their face would be dyed with shock.

Because the blade rotated at a high speed like a deep blue bullet. Even if it was Elysion there should be a limit.

Less than a second before it reached her neck——the sickle reacted just in time to flick away the sword.

Even though the Reaper was amazing to be able react to the blade flying at a high speed intercepting it while maintaining a posture she can't use much force in. It wasn't a feat a human could possibly pull off.

"Haaa! You're full of openings standing like that——!!!"

And, using that opening the boy delivered a blow with his fist to her.

As if the flow of time was completely different, as if he knew the reaction of the opponent beforehand, Taiga launched at her and sunk his fist deep into the Reaper's unprotected belly like it was an artillery shell.

The posture the Reaper was standing in wasn't fit for defending herself, and she rotated three times——

"Fly away!!"

As she rotated, and together with his loud voice, she was hit by an uppercut and blown away into the sky.

It wasn't just muscle strength. It was also strength derived from using his legs like a spring, amplified after passing through the muscles of his entire body, and a twisting the punch hit her internal organs, crushing her.

⟨"Body damage percentage, 10%."⟩

The Reaper's body bent and was thrown up ten meters above the ground, **crackle**, and an electromagnetic wave rippled through her.

The Reaper emitted a sound, a scream from her mouth. It seemed like the damage she accumulated was recognized as pain. But he didn't intend to go easy on her.

He bent his knees lightly, and kicked off the ground, jumping.

Taiga easily overcame gravity and grasped his nodachi that was flying in the air with perfect timing, and hit the girl's body with the speed of sound.

⟨"Body damage percentage, 15%."⟩

The supersonic slash caused a shockwave, and the Reaper screamed once again. While she tried to raise her sickle and resist, Taiga grabbed her hand not allowing it.

"It's the first aerial fight, Reaper!!!"

He twisted his entire body, and slashed with all his strength at the Reaper's small body, aiming for the shoulder.

The Reaper had no way to resist, and was knocked straight into the ground head on like lightning.

The continuous attacks would kill a normal human ten times already.

Taiga landed after finishing the chain of inhuman techniques, and stared at the ground as dust has risen from the shockwave after Reaper's fall.

His, swordsmanship——it wasn't just techniques that only used the sword.

His entire body was a weapon, at times he used solid slashes, but his swordsmanship specialized single-mindedly in destruction. Originally, it was just human opponents, so using the sword was enough, but in modern times there were many mechanical dolls to fight. And as such inhuman opponents appeared the swordsmanship techniques changed.

I don't know if I'll defeat her with this...

He didn't think she would come intact from that. There should be some damage dealt.

He looked at the other side of the dust cloud vigilant——and stood up all at once.

Find her, if he doesn't, he'll die.

As a split second alarm bell rang in his head warning him of the threat, he jumped to the side. A crimson slash cleaved with enough force to blow away the dust, and engraved itself into the ground on the plain ahead.

⟨"Body damage percentage, 20%. Experiment interrupted, target extermination recommended."⟩

The Reaper rose up like a ghost while holding a sickle that swayed like a flame.

《Jail》 that was confined within the sickle leaked out, looking like a crimson flame.

Seeing the red sickle slowly rise up, Taiga shouted.

"...flying slashes, give me a break with such an outrageous thing——!!"

While spitting curses, he kicked off the ground and accelerated.

The two slashes released just that moment cut into the earth where Taiga was earlier and left deep scars in the ground.

Without stopping his legs, he ran in a circle around the Reaper while maintaining a certain distance. The Reaper casually continued to release a storm of slashes while aiming at Taiga.

"If I'm hit by this I'll be eaten by a virus and it'll be the end! This is so messed up damn it!"

The Reaper's attack was unusual enough to cause Taiga to lose his composure. Even so, he still continued to observe the attack and analyse it in his head.

The speed of the slashes, the interval between two blows, the time required to rotate and how proportional it was to distance... he continued to cram it all into his head, and instinctively devised tactics.

He wasn't stupid enough to think about slowing down even for an moment, he instinctively knew that.

"———!!!"

As he was getting closer to her, she thrust at his belly

Taiga obstructed the thrust with the sheath, and as he dashed she released another slash. He avoided it in the very last moment as it almost grazed his cheek, and jumped to the side with all his strength avoiding the next two slashes.

The Reaper tried to fix the direction of her attacks, and continuous strikes stopped for a moment. He closed the distance aiming at that opening in an instant.

With a sheath in his hand, he stopped after reaching her and intended to cut her in two. But then, in a distance just a step away, it appeared.

"Wha——?!"

From the sickle the Reaper was holding, the crimson substance that covered it bubbled violently. And pebbles small enough to fit in the palm of a hand emerged one after another.

He could never forget that. That's what Rui was using——

As Taiga was stunned and showed an opening, multiple stones turned into blades, and his visibility was dyed white.

Part 3

"...ou....aah...?"

Suddenly struck with an unpleasant sensation, Tenryo Fuyuki woke up.

She raised her drowsy body up, and squinted as the sunset burned her eyes. She rubbed her eyes and stretched as drowsiness weighed on her shoulders, probably because she didn't sleep long.

"...Brother...is...?"

Half of her consciousness looked for warmth.

Fuyuki left the bedroom while walking barely conscious and unsteadily and headed towards the dive room. She found her brother sitting on the arclight unmoving, she sat comfortably on his lap.

But as she woke up little by little, she remembered what the current situation was.

"...Brother is probably in the middle of battle."

If he was sitting in the arclight like that, there was no doubt he was in Elysion. Even though she really wanted to go and assist him, she overused her eyes, was too dizzy, and was unable to use much strength.

After starting up the terminal, she contacted the other party that was registered just the day before. She called a few times, before the other person picked up and she appeared in a window.

"Hello Student Council President. Is everything alright?"

〈"Ah, it's Fuyuki-san. Did something happen?"〉

The other person was the student council president, Kiritou Haya. She had the usual graceful smile on her face.

To be honest, Fuyuki wanted to ask this woman a lot of things.

Like, how and when did she meet her brother, why do they get along so well, or why does she change her atmosphere and tone as if she was hiding behind a façade.

But, she didn't care about it right now.

"I was wondering how is it on that end. Is brother in 《Aries》 already?"

〈"Yes, he probably engaged in combat with the Reaper already. In case he loses, there's no way to check on him, since I cannot connect to him from here I don't know any details."〉

"Is that so. So there's no use."

Just like Fuyuki, Haya was clearly worried as well. Although she didn't know much about her, it was obvious that she held sincere feelings towards Taiga.

⟨"That's surprising. Aren't you worried about your brother?"⟩

"I am worried. I want to rush over there right away."

She said that and ended the call.

"...Little Sister's feelings, even if I told her, she wouldn't understand."

With her brain exhausted like that, she would only be a nuisance to him. Because she knew that, she could only suppress these feelings and wait.

Ever since that day eight years ago, when rather than her life her heart was saved, Tenryo Fuyuki could only think of him.

She wanted to support him, she wanted to live together with him, hoping for just that. Having to suppress those feelings——she definitely wouldn't understand.

Gently, she held her unconscious brother's hand.

Since electrical signals conveying to his senses were cut off, no matter what happened in reality, it wasn't transmitted to her brother who was in Elysion.

"...please, you must absolutely win."

Even so, Fuyuki continued to hold his hand.

Right now, her brother was fighting in a distant place, fighting for her best friend's life that was held captive.

She continued to pray for him.

This is... seriously bad.

Tenryo Taiga looked up at the pure white sky, and calmly grasped his own state. As dozen of swords pierced the ground around him and exploded,

even though he was seriously injured he felt weird, his mouth formed a smile.

"...she got me there... I didn't think, that she could use Rui's creative stones..."

He should have known. Iora had a high level learning ability. She probably imitated Rui's creative stones after seeing them in the previous battle.

Fortunately, since he wasn't hit with 《Jail》, his mental structure wasn't affected. However, the blades exploded at a close distance and buried his body, he avoided collapsing but his body interference dropped to nearly 20%, and he was immobile.

〈"Target immobile, resuming experiment."〉

rustle, he heard footsteps through the sand, and he saw a shadow in his field of view.

Attempting to stab Taiga who was lying on the ground, she swung the crimson scythe high up.

He knew that it will be all over once he's hit by that, but his body wouldn't move. He could only look at it.

...again, will I fail to save someone?

Together with that thought, he saw a flashback of what happened a long time ago.

——Long time ago, to the day he cursed himself.

It was an unusual day, where both of his parents had a day off together. Feeling it was a good idea, thought that they should take a picture together, and unlike his indoor little sister, he thought of going out together with their father 『"Let's all go out together as a family"』, she said.

It was the first time in few years that all four of them went out together.

While their mother was a famous painter, their father was a man who devoted himself to work and couldn't spend too much time with them.

They were in high spirits because it was the first time they went out like that in a while. He walked together with his little sister and parents. He also remembered the happy, smiling faces of his parents as they looked at them.

Because they didn't have a car, they were limited to using public transport. Unfortunately, there was an accident on the road to the station.

He was in a position that only allowed him to save his little sister in time, he decided it couldn't be helped and left them to die.

——Fuyuki knew everything up to that point.

What happened after that, even Fuyuki didn't know. An episode that shaped Tenryo Taiga as he was.

A heavy truck rushed ignoring the signal, and he jumped away while holding his little sister.

He embraced Fuyuki as to not show her what happened afterwards.

But he continued to look at his parents, because he was responsible.

And, the world has stopped.

He could not believe his eyes. It wasn't something a child should see.

Shouldering the deaths of two people, he accepted the consequences of his choice.

Even though he hated himself and resented himself for it, he believed in his choice.

——They smiled.

The parents that were left behind to die by their son 『We're glad that you are safe』, and smiled from the bottom of their hearts.

Seeing that smile, something cracked inside his mind.

Don't fuck with me.

Why are you smiling.

Why are you smiling at someone who left you to die.

I beg you, resent me. Curse me. Hate me. If you don't——these feelings, won't ever leave me.

While looking at their smile as they were squashed, he felt like his heart was covered with something black.

Hatred.

It was hatred he had for himself, for being relieved from seeing his mother smile. His thinking circuitry was overloaded with hatred for himself, unable to forgive himself for leaving them to die.

He couldn't forgive it.

His heart screamed, demanding punishment.

He hated himself, the one who couldn't save his parents, who was relieved seeing them smile as he left them to die. He hated himself more than anything else in the world.

That's why he pursued strength.

So that next time he could save everyone, in order to change himself, in order to punish himself.

Together with that curse he continued to pursue strength, a commandment he wasn't allowed to forget even for a moment.

Aiming for a height that a human could never reach, and yet putting absolute effort into it.

——Never again, he will allow this body of his to lose.

And with that, his thinking came back to reality.

Move.

He clenched his teeth strong enough to break his teeth. You are not allowed to be defeated, as long as you are alive, put some strength in those muscles and continue walking.

But, he wouldn't make it in time.

《"——— Activate"》

The blade was swung down on him.

If he's pierced, it will all be over, his mental structure will be eaten out, he won't save Rui, and he won't be able to save Iora. He will betray the trust of Fuyuki and Haya who bestowed him with their programs.

《"Scanning off, connection on."》

He won't allow such a thing, he will cut through reality.

Whether it's reality or a theory, Tenryo Taiga was not allowed to lose.

No matter how hopeless the situation was. That was the punishment Tenryo Taiga imposed on himself.

That's why, it didn't matter if it wasn't reality. It didn't matter who is his opponent. He will take it all down by force.

What awaited him was going beyond the limits, an area no one should ever step in.

Sound, light, time, all of it was left behind——

"———I PROMISED THAT I WILL SAVE HER... DON'T GET IN MY WAYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!"

《"Synchro Infinity ———!!!"》

Together with the severe pain of his brain circuits burning out, 《Synchro Infinity》 activated in response to his call.

At the same time he kicked up at the Reaper who held the sickle, bounced from the ground pushing himself out with a single hand, and twisted his body avoiding the blade which only cut his clothing.

All of that, in a split of a second.

Without stopping, he carried through striking back at the Reaper. But once again without any hesitation the sickle was swung at his body.

There was no skill, no technique in it, it was just a strike with superhuman brute force.

But, it was an attack that Taiga could easily see through and avoid by moving his neck lightly. And, a flash of his nodachi cut Reaper the once again, after that followed a roundhouse kick.

Now that the difference issue was resolved, both Taiga's 《Eye》, and his body could demonstrate their full performance.

The overwhelming dynamic vision that could capture rifle bullets in slow motion, instantly saw through the Reaper's attacks, and made it possible to avoid them just by using small movements.

⟨"Body damage percentage, 30%. target's complete annihilation recommended."⟩

The Reaper retreated and her red sickle's luster increased gradually. It was more vivid, and the density eerily increased. And she tried to launch slashes at him from long distance.

"Too slow!!!"

In an instant, Taiga closed the distance between them and pierced her shoulder with his sword, and sealed the movement of her shoulder using it as a wedge. The Reaper's arm stopped momentarily.

"Renjou Sword Technique, fifth form——— 《Hien》 !" [1]

Not missing the opportunity, the nodachi's blade was gradually covered in blue flames as he said that.

Cutting her and deeply penetrating her shoulder with brute force, he went behind her at the same time slashing her open back.

The Reaper tried to counter-attack after turning around and cutting his neck, but that motion was sealed as he grabbed her arm. He upset her posture by driving his knee into her abdomen, and cut her body again.

Fifth form 《Hien》 wasn't a fixed type technique.

To describe it simply, it would be fluent continuous attacks.

It didn't allow the enemy to find an opportunity to fight back, it was a swordsmanship skill that tightly combined both swordplay and hand-to-hand combat.

"OOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

The surging anger was released together with the roar.

Reaper wielded her scythe as she tried to resist, but it was deflected away by the nodachi. It never reached Taiga's body, it was as if he saw the future.

The nodachi clad in blue flames delivered slashes at the speed of sound as he danced wildly like a demon.

Whenever the sickle moved, it was intercepted, and the cuts were continuously engraved on the Reaper's body.

⟨"Body damage percentage, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%—————
—————!!!!!!"⟩

"Guoh?!"

He was forced to retreat because of the acoustic bomb he was hit with before, but this time at close range. At the same time the Reaper emitted creative stones which became blades.

It would be possible to cut someone's throat to prevent that in the real world, but it wouldn't work in Elysion. It was a movement that could not be stopped even if he noticed it with his 《Eye》, an unstoppable voice.

Now that Taiga was in a state of full synchronization, the sound attack that could break a glass window, was felt by him as if it was reality.

"I...it hurts, does this bastard intend to tear my eardrums...?"

He couldn't block his ears because he used both of his hands to block the blades, his head shook and vibrated.

That's when, **clank**, pain assaulted his head as if his skull was cracked.

"Gah...hua...kuhh——"

A massive headache hit his head, he felt like his nerves were directly assaulted inside of it. His visibility was impaired because of pain, and he felt so weak he almost fell on the ground.

"Hurry up... I don't have time..."

It was probably an indication of the 『Time limit』. Even though it was only activated for a minute, the usage of 《Eye》 seemed like it was a bigger burden than expected.

He faced the Reaper while suffering a continuous headache. He faced his opponent while enduring the pain. Around thirty creative stones were prepared.

"...just a little more. I beg you, just a little more!"

He kicked off the ground and flew like a bullet.

All creative stones simultaneously turned into swords, axes, and spears. Taiga intercepted a minimum of them and left his body to deal with the others. He bisected four linked spears in front of him, and approached the enemy.

He should be easily able to fend off the sickle now.

Convinced of his victory, he clenched the sword.

A moment later, he realized his blunder.

——— **shiing**

He heard a sound of metal rubbing against metal behind him, and something entangled with both of his arms.

"What?!"

What he saw, were iron chains that constricted his arms.

He saw it the other day, one of Rui's Creative Stones variant. He knew it.

But,

Just when, when did she throw that thing, how did I overlook it——

His enemy didn't have much time. There's no way he could have overlooked it with his eyes. He should have seen it.

There was only a moment. Only a fraction of a second, a time when his visibility became zero.

That time. She threw it the moment I closed my eyes because of pain.

The binds weren't strong, he could tear them off if he put some strength in it.

In front of him, the Reaper raised her sickle. At this rate if he tries to break the chains and avoid it he won't make it in time. And he couldn't completely deflect it without both of his arms. He could only release one of them.

He might have been able block it a little while ago with one arm, but not anymore.

——— The blocked pain is released, the damage dealt to the electronic body is transferred to you. If your arm is cut off, you will receive mental damage as if it really was cut off ———

He recalled Fuyuki's words.

Now that he was in a full synchro state he is more sensitive then a normal person, if his arm were cut, it will become unusable without a doubt.

And that wasn't an enemy he could win against with one arm.

But if it was the body that experienced being cut, there was hope.

"...haa."

He prepared himself for it long ago in order to win. Taiga laughed fearlessly, and he received the sickle's blow directly from the front.

slosh ———

"Gbouh...!"

The cutting edge tore into him from the shoulder and crushed his lung, and cut aiming for his heart.

He felt his body falling apart. He felt pain as if he was skewered with burning rods and a nausea welling up from his internal organs. Gritting his teeth trying not to lose consciousness because of pain, he grabbed the sickle deep in his belly with his right hand.

He will definitely not let it go——the sickle suppressed by force didn't even budge.

After he made a half step, it sank into his waist.

On his palm appeared the antibody program he received from Haya, he clenched his fist.

"Just how long, are you going to hide in someone else's body——!!!!!"

Together with a shout he drove his fist that was shining with blue light into the Reaper's belly. With all the strength he had in his virtual body and soul, he directly attacked the program data that mutated her.

〈"Foreign matter entering confirmed. Searching for countermeasure. Searching searching searching searching searching searching searching searching."〉

Blue light was crawling all over the Reaper's body.

First it started with a mad voice. And it started to become a noise like a broken radio's, one big sound that couldn't be called a voice.

Next, it was hair. The vibrant crimson colour disappeared little by little and went back to it's original colour. The blue light purified the foreign matter and eroded the sickle which was the symbol of madness, destroying the bond.

The scythe turned into small fragments, invisible for the naked eye.

When all of the crimson disappeared, instead of a Reaper, there was a mysterious girl who looked like a fairy.

"...it feels like it's been a while since I last saw you."

He caught her as she was falling down.

With just that the location he was slashed at ached, and he felt pain as if his entire body was burning, he contacted Haya while bearing with it somehow.

"I retrieved Iora. Collect us."

⟨"Well done Taiga! I'll restore the connection immediately!"⟩

"...no, before that how's Rui? Did she go back to normal properly?"

He certainly carved the program deep into Iora's body and it was able to process 《Jail》. But the unpleasant feeling didn't go away.

It's not over yet, there's still something that has to be done——that thought didn't disappear from his head

⟨"Please wait a second. I'll check now... no way, there's no change?! Was the program properly implanted in her?!"⟩

"Yeah, I should have beat it into her properly. ...?!!"

Suddenly. He saw crimson. A piece of crimson fell on the ground and gathered at one point. A huge lump of crimson light substance bashed violently deforming and trashing about.

"...Haya, cut the connection after you recover Iora. I'll contact you after all is finished."

〈"All is finished you mean——"〉

He ended the call after saying that much. A mass of crimson changed into a definite shape at the same time.

The figure that appeared on the end of the never-changing scythe, was of a stature twice as big as Taiga. It had a black hood covering its face, and it gave off a creepy cold feeling. Truly a Grim Reaper.

It was Aries's original nature, identification of viruses and their immobilization by manifesting them.

It didn't work until now because it was embedded into a virtual body, but now that it's been expelled from it, it has materialized.

"...shit."

He stood up halfway by using all of his strength, but just that caused him to make a big cough.

The pain that came from his insides was strong enough to make it seem like his entire body became a complete mess, severe pain ran amok making him feel as if he would be better off dead.

"Zuaa... gah... haa..."

His visibility was dyed white. His eyes were at their limits. His entire body screamed. It was impossible. He couldn't fight in such a body——

Immediately after he gripped his sword, the Reaper began to move. It's scream shakes the air and slashes at Taiga with it's scythe!

"Gu...!!"

The blow was heavier than that of the girl's, it has blown away his defence.

He rotated two, three times on the ground. And although he rebuilt his posture after rotating, the Reaper closed the distance by gliding through the air while holding a huge scythe matching its current physique.

Nodachi and scythe clash and a flurry of sparks appear between them. A heavy impact hits his arms with every blow and is transmitted into his body, a dull pain runs through his wounds.

His mind was being disturbed.

His body was barely standing.

His awareness barely endured.

It was the limit.

His brain was overused by 《Synchro Infinity》, severe pain assaulted his abdomen. A normal person would have gone mad a long time ago. It was an abnormal, suicidal act to fight in such a condition.

Somewhere in his mind he heard a whisper.

You did well. You saved Iora didn't you. It's okay to leave the rest to someone else.

"——Don't fuck with me."

The sounds of heavy strikes drowned the auditory hallucinations. His bones, lungs, internal organs, cells throughout his body screamed.

It's okay to leave the rest to someone else?

That girl, she was laughing until the very end, she believed in you, and that she will not disappear.

With that trust, with those feelings, are you going to betray that vow? You can still move. You can still fight.

If it hurts, withstand it. If you're losing consciousness hold on to it. It's fine to exceed the limit.

He took a deep breath while parrying an attack.

3, 2, 1 ——together with the countdown he roused all the cells in his body.

An imaged flashed in his mind. A lightning ran through his entire body sharpening it.

——— I believe in you. Brother ———

Burning out until the last drop of his fuel is left. Charging until there is no energy left, running the engine called mind at full horsepower.

——— Yup. I will be waiting, my Prince ———

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".....oooooooooooo000000000000000000000000  
000000!!!"
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That moment, the world stopped.

Feeling as if time flowed differently for him, with brute force he broke through the scythe and slashed the Reaper. The scream echoed.

Crimson light peeped from the tear he engraved on it, he placed the blue sphere inside of it.

"Finally... I got you out..."

Mental structures trapped in jail overflowed.

The souls were released and started to wander in search of their original bodies.

But, there was no time to be relieved because the tear he made started to recover, and in a few short seconds it was completely blocked.

"You really don't know when to die... Gu... guoh..."

—One more blow, if he delivers one more blow his body will really break.

It's enough.

He sheathed the nodachi slowly.

"..... "Secret Technique" first form———"

No tricks. There was no room for that. Purely smashing the enemy with the single strongest blow he had. His legs used all its strength to kick off, and he gathered his arms while in front of his prey.

The Reaper continuously slashed with his scythe. But the long range slashes released could not reach Taiga who ran at full speed and carved deep tears in the ground behind him.

Ten meters away from him his step collapsed, and Taiga's body sank.

Thinking only of decapitating his opponent, he condensed the speed and force to the limit, and at the same time as he released that power he unsheathed the nodachi!!!



"——— 《Haryuu》 !!!!!!!"

It was a godspeed sword-drawing technique that didn't even leave an after-image after slashing.

A supreme slash that had speed and power beyond the limit of humans has released a shockwave that seemed like it would tear the earth apart, and bisected the Reaper together with his scythe.

"—————
—————"

From the cut, a torrent of souls overflowed like a muddy stream.

Mental structures flew around looking for their bodies, and he sensed a girl that reminded him of sun,

"...sorry for the wait, Princess."

Taiga's consciousness sank into darkness.

At the same time, a single tear flowed on the cheek of a girl who was sleeping in a hospital room.

Epilogue - A Road Far Away, Aiming for The Sky

On that day, the hospital was very crowded because it was a holiday.

Patients rushed to the large and only hospital in the New City for examinations. There was a lot of people waiting in the lobby.

Passing by the side of that crowd, Tenryo Fuyuki set a foot into the general ward.

Waiting for procedures to finish at the entrance to the ward, her best friend who probably came with the same purpose came walked up to her, she had a surprised expression and a smile on her face.

"Eh—? And here Rui-san thought she will be first... why are you here, Fuyuki?"

"That's my line, Rucchan. Certainly, there's a wait until eleven o'clock, so why are you here an hour early."

Even though they smiled at each other, it didn't reach their eyes. Their gazes blamed the rival for trying to get a headstart, and as their eyes met sparks appeared between them.

On the chest of the girl with chestnut brown hair, shined a pendant that had a shape of the sun.

——Two days have passed ever since the confrontation with the Grim Reaper.

Rui and the Kiritou's researchers who had their spirit structure imprisoned have all woken up safely, the incident with Iolite running rampage has ended for the time being.

"Geez... Rucchan is also undergoing convalescence, you shouldn't overdo it. You'll collapse if you're not careful."

"Ahaha~, unfortunately Rui-san has already completely recovered. I can even run a marathon or something now. Fuyuki too, doesn't your head still hurt? Why don't you obediently go back?"

Rui's original physical strength and consciousness recovered very fast, it took just an hour and she was able to go home in the evening of the same day. Though, not knowing what after-effects there might be, she was continuously examined.

The two girls restrained each other.

It wasn't threatening, but it was a very chilly atmosphere. The nurse who serviced them said "Umm~this, the permit..." and held out the paper timidly.

Written on it was 『Room 202, Tenryo Taiga』 .

Fifteen minutes later.

Bathing himself in the daylight pouring from the window, and looking at the sky that was so sunny it felt hateful. Tenryo Taiga joined his hands on his head while lying in bed quietly.

——Immediately after defeating the Reaper, Taiga could no longer endure the pain and fainted.

His consciousness was returned to his real body by emergency withdrawal that operated normally after the connection was restored, but because of arrhythmia and seizures caused by pain's feedback, he collapsed on spot.

After that, Fuyuki called an ambulance, he was transported to the hospital and landed in the hospital room because of severe trauma. He woke up yesterday after being administered with painkillers.

The uncomfortable feeling in his internal organs that felt like scrapping a wound still remained, but there was no problems with his body itself.

To be more exact, he felt overly energetic.

"...what a good weather~"

"Oh, you look pretty well."

"Oouu?!!"

He was so distracted he didn't even notice the sound of the door opening. When he looked at the source of the voice, he saw Kiritou Haya's figure closing the door behind her.

"...what, do you have anything you're guilty of?"

"You startled me— ...so, I wondered who it was, but it's Haya. Why are you here so early?"

"Since the aftermath was dealt with at last, I had time and decided to visit you. I've heard you are getting discharged today too."

Speaking of her appearance, it was very like her, Haya's outfit looked like one a lady would go in to a summer resort. She sat on the bed's edge, he didn't believe she came to visit him.

"I didn't thank you yet. Well done, for the time being. Thanks to you Iora was able to come back safely, thanks."

"You're welcome... speaking of which, what happened to Iora?"

〈"Did'ya call?"〉

Wondering when was she projected, he suddenly looked at his shoulder and saw a minimum size girl floating there.

Same as ever, but the strange wording of hers gave him a nostalgic feel, he responded to her with a wry smile.

"Heya, it's been a while."

〈"No idea if it's been a while, but hello. Taiga."〉

She lightly lowered her head, on her face was a faint smile. Completely different from how her face was as a Reaper. Even compared to Iora from before the Reaper incident, it felt like her emotions were more natural.

"Surprised? Somehow after returning back to normal, she evolved and became even more sensitive."

"Hee..."

Saying that it was no different from a humans would be exaggerating, but without a doubt it was the most human smile an AI ever had.

And that definitely made Kiritou Haya happy.

I wonder if it's because I went through that kind of thing. But it seems like there's some anxiety remaining...

In the first place her rapid development was a trigger for 《Jail》 to activate. No matter how many times full scan was performed no abnormality was found, and they still haven't identified who wrote 《Jail》 . There was a reason to be cautious.

...even if I think about it I can't do anything. Let's examine it steadily.

There were no candidates for it. There was no need to rush——for the time being she had one more thing to do, and she took out a card from her pocket.

"Taiga, please take this."

"Nn, isn't this a money card?"

It was an electronic money card, it was applied by scanning it with personal terminal. Engraved on it was a genuine emblem of Kiritou Group. The amount of money it charged was——fifty thousand.

"...haa, can it be, you're paying me to keep me silent?!"

"No way I'd do such a thing. There should be no problem with this little, it's the bounty for the Grim Reaper. It wasn't officially registered but... well, it's payment for your work. Spend it as you please."

The Reaper was identified by Aries as a virus and given a form. Price should be set automatically at that point.

"...is this fine?"

"Fine or whatever. It's the reward for your work. If you don't want it, just discard it."

Being told that, he had no choice but to accept it.

After confirming that Taiga held the card next to his terminal, Haya stood up.

"Well then, I'll be going back. Let's go, Iora."

〈"Understood, Master. Taiga, let's talk later."〉

Miniature-size Iora was gone from his shoulder, and Haya left.

Taiga looked at her back, and stretched on the bed. His joints made a dry sound, partly because they weren't used for two days.

"——Well then, it's about time."

He jumped down from the bed, and grabbed his packaged luggage. Like that Taiga left the hospital room.

Meanwhile,

The girls who came to pick up Taiga after he was discharged——couldn't enter the ward at the same time, and waited for the boy outside of the hospital.

By the way, that didn't mean he was forgotten.

"Rucchan made too much commotion. You didn't have to trouble yourself to pick Brother up."

"Mu, I don't want to be told that by Fuyuki who tried to get a headstart. ...though Rui-san is the same."

The two of them made a commotion in the ward entrance, and were ordered by the nurse to leave, and even though they were against it, they decided to wait outside of the hospital obediently.

It was spring's soft sunlight, it was comfortable even if they stayed outside——.

A delicate atmosphere was hanging between the two of them as their backs faced each other, and Rui decided to spark a conversation.

"Hey, Fuyuki... there's one thing I need to tell you, will you listen?"

There was no answer. But it was definitely heard, and believing she will listen to her,

"I, Saionji Rui am in love with Tenryo Taiga."

Those feelings, she revealed them to her best friend and rival.

It was a declaration of war.

The girl who turned away looked back, and continued her speech.

"Because I met him just recently, my reasoning was simple, I thought 『Let's think about it a little longer』 or something like that you know? But you know, I'm deeply in love with that cool prince, I can't stop myself."

I won't lose to Fuyuki——thinking like that, she faced her sky blue eyes straight. Those words were a head on challenge towards Fuyuki.

"No matter where, no matter to whom, I will never give Brother to anyone. Little Sister will always be by Brother's side, and will always support him. That person chasing his ephemeral dream, is my most beloved."

After listening to her best friend's rival declaration, Fuyuki didn't budge at all. Two different girls glared at each other——and they smiled together.

"Fufufu, having two people attracted to the same boy sure is difficult."

"So it is〜"

Basked in sunlight both girls had radiant smiles, and waited for the person they thought about. Isn't he coming yet, it's about time——in the middle of it, Rui asked a question.

"Speaking of which, Fuyuki. Why did you fall in love with Taiga? I don't think you loved him ever since you were born, right?"

"You want to know... well it's not that special, it's pretty easy."

"So how?"

"...it was right after our parents died in an accident. Our heritage was ransacked and wasted by some relatives, and to get rid of Brother and Little Sister, they were put up for adoption. Little Sister had a talent as a hacker and was adopted by Karasuba's, Brother at that time was attending a dojo that had connections to Renjou and was picked up by them. Little Sister back then still didn't accept her parent's death, after being separated from her brother she realized 『I'm alone now』."

No matter how many unusual talents she had, Fuyuki was only seven years old at that time. Losing three people from her family in such a short time was too much for her.

"I cried all day long because of that. When I got tired of crying I went to sleep, and I started crying again when I woke up dreaming a nightmare. And then I went to sleep again... I waited three days to be picked up, every day was like that."

"...and Taiga?"

"Because Little Sister's room was secluded there was no opportunity to meet... and then on the last day, two hours before they came for us, we met."

She saw a young boy who blamed himself for everything, he could no longer cry, his heart was worn out and ragged and looked far worse than his little sister.

If just a little strength were to be put in, he would break. The only family she had left, debilitated so much it was dangerous.

"And then Brother forced Little Sister outside. Let's play together, he said. Game of tag, hide-and-seek... we played so much we didn't have time to grieve. And then I noticed, Little Sister desperately wanted Brother to smile."

He was so badly distorted, it looked very painful, and very lovely, seeing that figure she thought 'Yeah, this person is somehow broken.' And she stopped crying, she laughed.

"As not to have Brother regret that time in the future, I did my best to smile as we parted——that's what I decided, it was our last meeting. And as I parted with Brother, he said 'Someday, definitely we will live together again.'. And that, was unfair. Although I decided to part with him with a smile on my face, being told that I cried from joy."

Cry, cry, it's a promise.

For the sake of living together in their own house, both of them did their best.

"And well, that opportunity was like a trigger."

"...that seemed kinda dramatic～"

"It's embarrassing so it's a secret between you and me, okay?"

"Yup. Got it."

Both of them smiled facing each other, and turned around in agreement, they saw a boy walking slowly towards them.

"Brother～ Over here～!"

"If you don't hurry up we'll leave you behind～"

Then, it was time to start a sweet and sour, exciting and fun day——

"...you're standing out so stop that..."

Taiga was called out to by two cute girls in front of a hospital full of people, he was troubled by a huge amount of piercing stares. Although he was glad they came to pick him up, it was problematic that they didn't know just how much they were standing out.

"...well, it can't be helped."

If he's to walk around with them, he has to be prepared to stand out. And he already decided in his mind. That he wants to stand next to those people. He wanted to be with them, that's what he thought. And he looked up at the sky.

It was a perfectly clear, endless blue sky, like a dream he wanted to reach, he wanted to stretch his hand and reach out towards it.

I want to go there, I want to go above it and look at the scenery, that was his dream.

"——Let's go."

Slowly, he began to walk towards the girls who waited for him.

The road leading towards his goal was long, he didn't know how long it was and how far it would take him.

But he still believed he can reach it, he decided in his mind that he will continue to walk towards the end.

For now, I have to beat this dull body into shape.

——The boy, aimed to be the strongest.

Afterword

Nice to meet you, I'm Kazuma Jouchi.

I hope that you enjoyed 『ELYSION virtual region』 .

It's a story based on science, concentrating on network technology that might, or might not be developed in near future. A stage where heretical siblings rampage, a science fiction battle action.

Actually, this is the first one I have ever thought of. I took my time building the setting and thinking of characters, little sister, Fuyuki is completely different now than she was in conceptual stage, the innocent cheerful personality in this work was passed down to Rui.

If you paid attention to the content of this book, you might notice that all characters had something edged in their hearts. Although they were blessed with talent and position, and yet were forced the cruel reality. But even though it was hard and painful, they decided in their hearts to move forward.

——And so, it might sound a little serious, but I 『I want to write a story about a cool protagonist and a cute heroine!』 just that.

Please feel the agony of devilish little sister's cuteness, and angelic Rui-chan's pure heart.

Ah, one more thing. Even though I love games (especially Monster Hunter 4 and God Eater 2), in fact I haven't played any MMORPG's. I have tried the two before, but after reaching the max level I unsubscribed right away, I wouldn't be able to stand the wait for next updates.

But that did not influence this work, 《Aries》 is not a simply an MMORPG. It's a game that has a meaning to its existence. Although the setting may be a bit funny, please don't laugh at it too much (smiles wryly).

The credits. I am indebted to all the people who allowed me to release this book. Takeishi-sama who took care of the editing and me before the debut. For telling me everything when I didn't know left from right. Thank you very much.

nauribon-sensei who took care of the illustrations for me, Thank you. No matter which illustration is it, the girls are very cute and attractive.

Editor-in-chief, calibrators, bookbinders, I am grateful to everyone who was involved in releasing this work.

And in the end, the biggest thanks to the readers who picked up this book.

Because of that I think I can write an exciting story from now onwards, Thank you very much.

Well then, let's meet again in volume 2.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keikogi>
 2. ↑ It's a pun, the "collapse" here can also mean they'll fall into debt.
 3. ↑ Usually Fuyuki uses Ani, which is more mature way of addressing older brother.
 4. ↑ Itadakimasu - In other words, words used before eating, and considered good manners. Some translate it to "let's eat." though, it's not entirely correct.
 5. ↑ Mu, is a Japanese onomatopoeia for being annoyed/angry/jealous, but more on the positive side. It comes from the word Mukatsuku – be annoyed/angry/pissed off.
 6. ↑ Ani here is usually translated as Brother, which is a kinda-mature way of calling an older brother and probably the term that's most similar to English "Brother", Onii is more childish way of calling an older brother, so it's usually distinctively left untranslated.
 7. ↑ Shuraba – In other words, a battle, carnage, hell, that's how battle between girls over one man is sometimes referred to in Japanese
 8. ↑ Hien used here means Flying Swallow, however if you write it differently it can also mean scarlet flame.
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Credits

Author : Kazuma Jouchi

Illustrator : nauribon

Translator & Editor: krytyk (<http://krytykal.org/>)

PDF compiled by: Kiri
